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LUCY FITZADAM:

An Autobiography.


Adam's own child—a Stray; in misty doubt
Truth's fair directing finger seeking out;
Nor wanting quite, though dim her dubious way,
Some Light reflected from lost Eden's Day.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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LUCY FITZADAM.

CHAPTER I.

A CHAPTER BESET BY DOUBTFUL MUSIC.—A CLUE TO THE OBJECT OF MR. THAIN'S LATE MISSION TO LONDON AFFORDED.

Mariana. I could well wish

You had not found me here so musical.

Measure for Measure.

A PARISH church in the guise of a Grecian temple reared its pyramid of diminishing porticoes—that is, its tower—within a short distance of our dwelling. I have not yet mentioned the tyrannical bells which ruled the neighbourhood from this edifice; and I wonder at my silence. Whenever I now think of the Crescent and of my life there, I hear again the loud, bullying, and vulgar clang; and feel myself worried and crushed by bells. There never were such bells as those in question. Whatever may have been the extent of the entire peal, I remember but three notes, those of the common chord—and

certainly, so expressed, it seemed much more common than usual—by which the parishioners were thumped and stupefied to church. Fifth, third, keynote: fifth, third, keynote:—that was the sequence. There was such a virulent resonance about the tones, such a pungent, inevitable twang with them—especially, as I used to think, before week-day prayers—that while the noise lasted, one was reduced to an alternation of madness and stupor; feeling, one moment, like Hogarth's *Enraged Musician*, the next, like a calf. Should not those who are summoned to breathe together the generous and affecting prayers of the church—how much calm and help those prayers have brought me amidst all my uncertainties of creed!—be invited by nobler and gentler music than this?

The bells were exerting their usual power upon me on the Wednesday evening next after Mr. Thain's visit (we were not going to church that day), when the din was momentarily relieved by the crack of the postman's knock. If the opera was to Charles Lamb at all what the bells were to me, I can well understand the redress he found in listening to common street noises after suffering the agonies of the harmonious theatre.

There would be great advantage in acquiring the habit of expecting nothing from the postman, who has a way of upsetting the most careful calculations; of bringing a circular when a love-letter is looked for, and of omitting to bring anything when a cheque is confidently anticipated. I have never been able so to control my expectations; and thus, have fallen in with several disappointments, and have also missed some agreeable surprises. I now

said to my mother who was sitting near me : “ Nothing for us, of course ; ” by which formula she probably well understood not only that I undoubtedly believed the newly-arrived letter to be ours, but that I expected it to contain news of the most pleasant description. The limits of my hope, as my mother opened the missive now brought in, were far from being strait ; they admitted the prospect of instant recovery on the part of my father, and of an immediate return to Westford—to say nothing of several other cheerful items which Fancy presented to my vision as being perhaps implied in the writing under perusal.

Fancy went too far ; but I soon knew that the intelligence received was welcome. I saw my mother’s eyes run rapidly over the sheet she held, and I saw them gather joy as they moved. Her voice was husky, her lip trembled as she exclaimed :—

“ Really good news, my child—thank God for it ! Read that.”

She gave me the letter as she spoke ; it was from the physician in whose care my father had been placed. The words were a good deal excited as I read them, and performed several remarkable feats of agility upon the page ; but they grew steadier presently, and allowed themselves to be made out as follows :—

The Cedars, October —, 185—.

MY DEAR MADAM,—

AT what hour on Friday next may I reckon on finding you at home ? I have been much encouraged lately as to Mr. Fitzadam’s case ; I wish to talk to you of the improvement and its cause at the earliest opportunity.

Be good enough to let me hear from you to-morrow ; but do not come down, or you may miss me, which I should regret.

“ Your’s very faithfully,

“ BENJAMIN RAY.”

When I had finished reading, my mother and I kissed each other. Then, hastily diving in her waist for the little watch that dwelt there, my mother found out that in ten minutes’ time one of the London district posts would “ go out ; ” she also persuaded herself it was of paramount importance that this post should be “ caught,” to carry her reply to the doctor. Accordingly there was a sudden hunt and scramble for writing materials ; which, it seemed, objected to be found ; and which, when found, displayed a perverse tendency to tumble down, to become entangled in other things, and to stick together. The note itself did not progress favourably ; for my mother once addressed the doctor as “ My dear Mr. Cedars,” and once as “ Reverend Sir.” Seeing that haste stood in the way of speed, I suggested that after all there was no object in sending by the first post. When mamma found that I was in alliance with her agitation and the writing materials against her project, she was displeased ; but after a few harmless words of characteristic warmth as to my “ unaccountable apathy and torpor at such times,” she accepted my view of the case, and finished her communication deliberately.

The next day was a long day. My mother rose exceedingly early, furnished with an elaborate and conclusive argument in favour of an immediate journey to the

Cedars. Esther took upon herself to demolish this argument, and to show that calmness and patience on my mother's part were indispensable to my father's complete recovery. Esther's logic told; and forthwith mamma put on an air of unusual tranquillity, interspersing amongst the different operations of her toilet, intervals of seeming absorption in profound and placid meditation. New schemes for action of various kinds suggested themselves to the dear lady's mind throughout the day; but as soon as their inutility was shown, she abandoned them with great frankness, falling back upon her forced serenity for relief.

While we sat at breakfast the daily country post came in. It brought us but one letter, which was from Mr. Shaw, my father's managing clerk. The news from him were not good. He was sorry, he said, to have an unfavourable report to give of our friend Mr. Thain. The old gentleman, it appeared, had been much excited by his late visit to London—a visit undertaken on some business in which (as Mr. Shaw was informed) he had felt great interest. The excitement, combined with the long and hurried journey from Westford to London and back, had proved too much for the old gentleman's strength. On the evening of his return he had been visited by slight paralysis. Happily the disease had been combated early, and there was every prospect of cure. But for some time to come great care must be taken, and every agitating employment eschewed.

The letter went on to say that fortunately Mr. Ralph Thain had returned from his wedding-tour: and that devoted as he usually was to business, nothing could now

induce him to absent himself for any length of time from his father's room.

The picture which the letter placed before my mind's eye was affecting. It displayed the odd, awkward energies that had never been exerted but for kindly ends, as crippled and stilled: the weird ungainly shape—enclosing a child's pure heart—stretched out in horizontal uselessness; and it represented as tenderly watching over the sick, pale anxious Ralph—the man whose idiosyncrasy it was to lay everything so deeply to heart; the man who had blushed at the disorder of his father's hair; who had turned grey in love-making; whom the helplessness of infancy, of sickness, or of age had ever possessed so large a power to govern and inspire!

The tidings of Mr. Thain tended again to depress our spirits which had lately been raised. The promise of recovery which accompanied the announcement of the illness was, however, so distinct, that there seemed to be no reason for serious alarm. Our hopefulness about my father, moreover, doubtless facilitated hopefulness about Mr. Thain too; and on the whole we were still able to be tolerably cheerful. My mother at once wrote a letter of sympathy to Ralph; and I was glad of the hour's occupation which the task afforded her.

I cannot say how thankful I felt when this day of suspense was over. It proved, however, to be by no means at an end at bedtime; for my mother was restless and talkative during several hours of the night, and so was I through fellow-feeling.

The hour appointed for the doctor's visit was 11 A.M.

Long before that time we were ready: long after it—so we thought, but in truth for twenty minutes only—we waited. A handsome carriage and pair at last drew up at the door. I hastily hid the stocking which I had been darning behind the sofa-cushion.

I mention this last-named action of mine on principle, by way of introduction to further confessions. I was ashamed that this famous physician should see us amidst our present surroundings. I thought of his wealth, his position, his probable culture and refinement; and I wished that he might have visited us anywhere but in the Crescent. Even the good and patient plane-trees outside, seemed poor beggarly things, while the knock of the doctor's grand footman rang in my ears: the room suddenly became low, the furniture squalid, my own daintiest personal properties inelegant, as this great gentleman's foot-step sounded on the stair.

I am obliged to own that my base shame lasted till the doctor was at least midway between the hall-door and our sitting-room. Then a healthy re-action set in. "Lucy Fitzadam," I said to myself, "pray is this Religion? Is it even good breeding? Is it not rather pure snobbish worldliness?"

I whipped the stocking out from behind the sofa-cushion; and by the time the door opened, I had got to darning again. The plane-trees rustled in sympathy as I came to myself; and I begged their pardon for my falseness.

As soon as I saw the doctor—this was my first introduction to him—I felt particularly glad that I was able to receive him with something of the spirit of a true gentle-

woman, for it was plain that he was a gentleman in the word's right sense. Nevertheless, I fell to criticising him sharply. I thought I did not like his manner—it was harsh and abrupt; then I decided that I did—it was frank and manly. At first his language offended me, as being too laboured and technical; but presently I began to detect a minute precision in his words which carried to the attentive mind none but distinct impressions. For a while I felt dissatisfied with his eyes, which reminded me of two conscientious but exceedingly plain domestic servants; ere long, however, their reliability won my full approval, and I overlooked their ugliness and their gowns of grey duffel in consideration of their trustworthiness.

I was told that I need not leave the room while Doctor Ray made his communications to my mother; I therefore stayed and heard all that she heard. The story was briefly this:—

On the previous Monday, one of the gentlemen who had attended my father on his first arrival at the Cedars, had presented himself to the doctor, expressing a strong wish to see the invalid. A strange impression was upon his mind, he had said, that the interview might benefit the sick man: he had urgently begged that by way of experiment his request might be granted.

After some consideration the doctor had consented to the meeting. At the time of that meeting my father had been in his usual state: well in general health, but as liable as ever to dangerous outbursts of irrationality.

It was undeniable, the doctor added, that our friend's visit had done good. The sight of the visitor—or the

words that he had spoken—had unquestionably touched some cord in the invalid's nature, the vibration of which had operated healthfully. Since the meeting, rational inquiries had thrice been made by my father for my mother and myself: and although these lucid moments had been divided by hours of the usual obscurity, they must certainly be regarded as hopeful and encouraging facts.

The reader will of course have recognized the visitor to my father as Mr. Thain. Dr. Ray's main object in coming to us, he now went on to say, was to inquire about this friend of ours. What were the relations of my father's history to his? Where did he live? How soon, how often, might he be asked to repeat his visit, and bring to bear again the unknown but salutary influence, which he had, as it appeared, exercised upon the sick man?

Certain remarks now followed, upon which I shall touch but gingerly, lest I should commit myself by misstating what I do not pretend to have fully understood. Much was said about the difference between cerebral disorders called forth by definite and adequate mental trouble, and those displaying themselves without any such provocation. Of the former it was alleged that *mental* remedies were most likely to touch them; and in this fact, it was explained, lay the interest and importance to be ascribed to Mr. Thain's recently exhibited ability to employ such remedies upon my father.

I will undertake to say that while the foregoing questions were put, and the foregoing explanations given, my mother's thoughts pursued a course similar to my own; and my own ran through wonder into regret. I wondered

to learn that the real design of Mr. Thain's visit to London—the design to which he had attached so great an importance—had been that of gaining an interview with my father: I deeply regretted both that his singular effort on my father's behalf had been injurious to himself, and that his illness must now for a long time prevent the continued exertion of his incomprehensible but seemingly favourable influence upon the sufferer.

My mother gravely told what the doctor wished to know; explaining of course that Mr. Thain was now sick and disabled. In replying, the doctor was kind, sympathizing, hopeful. I remember that in speaking of the apparently perverse concurrence of events by which we were deprived of help at the very time of its manifestation, he referred to the Providential arrangement of such conjunctures. I remember too that the reference—as made by this practical man of science—seemed forcible and consoling.

As soon as he was gone, I felt it my plain duty to cheer my mother as much as possible. There was no doubt about it that a hope which had been suddenly kindled, had as suddenly received a considerable check. But upon this view of the case it was unprofitable to dwell. The more animating and useful aspect of affairs was simply that my father had lately given signs of returning health, such as had been wanting before, and such therefore as might, without unreasonableness, be expected to increase. The improvement effected by one instrumentality, might be maintained and augmented by others.

My mother, in whom the hopeful faculty was strong,

proved to be within the power of this reasoning; and whenever her spirit showed signs of drooping, I revived them by its aid. After the doctor's visit, our life remained unvaried for many successive weeks. The news from the Cedars and from Westford neither materially improved nor deteriorated: from the former place we heard that the advance made had been followed by no retrogression; from the latter, that convalescence was proceeding at the slow pace which had been expected.

Amidst the quiet home duties, and daily trials of patience, which this season brought me, my religion lost much of its fanatical character. As it gradually took a more human and domestic shape, the sacrifice which I had made at the shrine of Calvinism declared itself to me with growing plainness, as having been a selfish error. Thus if I was alone and unoccupied, I was sure to brood gloomily over what I now recognized as a vast and irreparable mistake. My mind was too often full of my blunder, so that when I turned inwards little else but this met me. I was thankful that the duty of cheering my mother, involved me frequently in an enforced self-forgetfulness.

I may here state that since that day of my return from Beremouth, when my mother's altered appearance had so reasonably appalled me, her health and her aspect had alike improved. Her prediction had been verified: she had not succumbed to misfortune; and the first shock of her sorrow past, she had endured with courage and success. But I often saw still, how heavy was the tax which anxiety and suspense imposed upon her nature; and

it became my increasing desire to eke out her endurance by my encouragements.

And now the last leaves trembled down from the plane-trees ; the winter smoke-clouds came about us ; Christmas drew near.

I was going to close my chapter at this point ; but remembering that it began in the midst of a din, I suddenly determined that it should end under somewhat similar conditions.

Many of my lesser trials at this time arose from noises of various kinds. To these Mr. Cruse, no less than the bells, continued to contribute. Not only did the grunting and boot-throwing proceed as usual ; but a dreadful tendency on Mr. Cruse's part to snore at night was developed. Mr. Cruse's bed-chamber adjoined ours ; and being just now troubled with nocturnal wakefulness, I suffered from Mr. Cruse's habit more than I can say. Of all sounds to which a sleepless person can be doomed to listen, I take snoring to be the worst. The range of its power of offence is almost illimitable. It embraces the savagery of snarling, the deep melancholy of the moan, the awfulness of thunder : it induces unutterable weariness, dire despondency, implacable fury, nameless fear. There is a horrible hypocrisy about it : it will suddenly assume the nature of calm infantile breathing, and pretend never to have been anything else ; bursting forth again, when the contemptible simulation is over, with an aggravated violence which fills the distracted listener with a wild longing for revenge. Once my desire for vengeance on Mr. Cruse completely got the better of me. I sprang out of bed, and rapped in a loud

and sudden manner—designed to have a supernatural effect—against the wall with the back of a hairbrush. The demonstration availed for but a short time; but it was some satisfaction to have made a public protest against a crying abuse.

Mr. Cruse had by this time been frequently seen by our party. He proved to be a weakly-built elderly man, long and solemn of face, obsequious in manner, purple about the nose, and not always steady on his feet. The sight of the overworked and not too temperate city clerk had produced upon us, in a somewhat roundabout manner, one notable result: it had greatly added to our respect for the wife who had been so anxious to recommend him to our good opinion, and who perhaps had kept him as much as possible out of our sight, lest the reality concerning him should please us less than her representations.

CHAPTER II.

ESTHER AS A COUNSELLOR.

Say, is there any point so nice
As that of offering an advice ?—WILKIE.

She would fear
No petty customs or appearances ;
But think what others only dreamed about ;
And say what others did but think ; and do
What others would but say ; and glory in
What others dared but do ; so pure withal in soul.—*Festus.*

ON Christmas-eve I persuaded Esther, who had been ailing, to take a stroll with me. I succeeded in getting her as far as the Regent's Park ; and was rewarded for the effort, in seeing her enjoyment of the open space, the frosted grass, and the unsullied sky.

We walked slowly home, the old woman being tired ; and we talked all the way. Her words were particularly interesting to me, for they related to her own past history. On this subject she was generally reticent : I looked upon it as a kind of treasure-drawer, into which it was a privilege even to peep.

She spoke of her husband, now dead these many years. She had an odd way of describing him negatively ; and her descriptions—if such they may be called—related, I

observed, solely to moral qualities. I heard nothing as to the physical characteristics of the deceased, and half feared that he must have been an excessively small person with a soul out of all proportion to his body. This misgiving, however, was soon lost in love and reverence for his entire nature, and in an aching consciousness that there was one man whom I could worship as Esther had worshipped him. Something was said further about the humble village roof from which the rustic husband had taken his bride; about the brief months of their union; about two deaths—that of child and father; about succeeding farm-house service, followed by introduction to our own home.

Occupied upon the talk which ensued on this narration, we had reached the well-known gigantic Doric gateway, that so greatly transcends the Northern Railway Station to which it forms the entrance. Opposite this gateway, southwards, is an open space, shut in east and west by two large hotels. Crossing the carriage-way, we gained the pavement overlooked by the lower windows of one of these hotels.

Suddenly a vivid idea of mine passed into reality; a picture of my brain became flesh and blood. The sequence was so easy and natural, that, despite its unexpectedness, I hardly felt surprise: so agreeable was the realization, that for a few moments I simply enjoyed it. Then came an awakening—and not a pleasant one. I knew that I, pale as ashes, was looking, through a pane of plate glass, at Mr. Robert Tyndal; and I knew that this must not go on. Accordingly I looked away from Mr. Robert Tyndal; who, nevertheless, continued looking at me—for I *felt* his

eye after I had ceased to watch it. Then my whole bodily strength seemed to be sapped; my heart fluttered like a feather in the air; and a melting, dwindling sensation overspread me, as though I were a sugar ornament exposed to rain.

But a firm arm was within mine, which sustained me effectually. Esther, always ready of perception, had recognized that face and figure as soon as I; she was not ignorant what kind of feelings the recognition would cost me. She did not speak, but gave me her support; and we went silently home.

As soon as we were indoors I followed the old woman to her room. That I must give way to an outburst of grief I well knew; I felt that I would rather Esther should witness it than not.

Having shut my nurse's bedroom door behind me, I sat down and cried in an abundant and business-like manner. Esther seemed to see that a considerable quantity of salt water must be spent; and she made no attempt to stay my tears, but removed her bonnet and shawl, and took up some work. After a while I reached that stage of weeping at which it begins to appear absurd, after all, that grief should express itself in ugly contortions of the face, and in wetness; and forthwith I dried my eyes, and assumed an appearance of swelled composure. Afterwards followed that state of angry dissatisfaction with existence which in childhood had led one to break something, to throw articles upon the floor, or to be cruel to somebody one loved. I grew offended with Esther for not speaking; and was almost ready to snatch the garment she was mending out

of her hands. At this moment, however, she laid down her work, and said,—

“Now, come an’ taalk to me a bit, Lucy.”

I went and knelt by her side, leaning my head upon her knees. She was again silent for a time; and then speaking slowly and firmly, added,—

“Lucy, you mus’ put this here matter to rights.”

“What do you mean, Esther?” I peevishly muttered amongst the folds of her gown. “How *can* I ‘put the matter to rights?’ You *know* there is nothing to be done. Why do you teaze me by saying such ridiculous things?”

I tried hard to cry again, but unfortunately I could not manage it now.

“Lor’, there, Lucy!” said old Esther, with a slight suppressed laugh, of which I felt the vibration, though I did not see her face, “you beänt altered a mossle from what you was twelve year back: you do turn cross wi’ yer old nuss in a minute.”

“Dear Esther!” I said, relenting, and kissing her hands.

“Aah; there you be, Lucy, jest the same! Now, be ‘e goin’ to listen, or beänt ‘e? If not, be off wi’ ‘e.”

“I *am* going to listen, Esther.”

“Then I tell ‘e aggen, Lucy, as you mus’ put this here matter to rights; *you* mus’ do it, an’ nobody else.”

I writhed, and felt a naughty infantile wish to hurt Esther’s knees—just a little bit—as I leaned upon them. She went on:—

“You’ve a-stopped the way for yer sweetheart, an *you* mus’ be the one to move now. I’ve a see’d how ‘twere from

the fust day as I know'd what you'd a-done down to Beremouth."

"Esther," I said, petulantly, suddenly lifting my head from her lap, "it really is most foolish and unkind of you to go on like this. In heaven's name what am I to do? Do you want me to run about after the man, beseeching him to come back to me? Am I to go down on my knees to him, and say I didn't mean it, and that I'm sorry, and that——"

Here I dashed my head down again, in a kind of hope that I might injure my face in doing so. I am sure the old woman yearned over me in my angry self-reproach. She answered with wonderful forbearance:—

"Lucy, you be a-thinkin' too much o' yerself, an' too little o' yer sweetheart. You've a-done *he* a mishtif; the fust thing, now you be come to yourself, is to make amends to he."

"Amends, indeed! And how am I to know that he cares a straw to have amends made to him? The chances are he has been in love with a dozen girls since June. Don't you know that?"

"No Lucy, no more don't you."

"If he cared so very much for me then, why didn't he come to me again? If he had loved me so very wonderfully how could he have borne to go away as quickly as he did—just because of one hastily-written note?"

"You 'stopped his way,' Lucy, as I was a sayin'—I'll be boun' you did! I'll be boun' as you gave him cause to go away, an' stop away too."

It was true. I remembered the letter I had written to

him; the cool deliberation which it had implied; the inflexible firmness of its decision; its final and solemn supplication for freedom from any fresh appeal. As I could not dispute Esther's assertion, I made no further remark on that point, but proceeded:—

“And what then, Esther, in the name of—of—of—Job,” I said, lighting on the patriarch more in desperation than anything else, “what, pray, do you wish me to do?”

I thought she would shrink from an answer to this direct question: I forgot her straightforward practical mind.

“To write another letter,” she said, promptly; “one as shall undo the fust.”

I sprang up, and told my nurse in no measured terms that to act as she proposed would be to perpetrate the most unwomanly, unheard-of, preposterous, and unpardonable deed that a girl could possibly commit. I said that she really did not understand the usages of society; that she must consider what I owed to my own dignity and reputation; that very likely I had done quite right after all in refusing Mr. Tyndal; that certainly my state of mind had been better, holier, more hopeful then, than it was now.

At last I saw something like genuine anger mantling in my nurse's face. But I also saw her drive down her wrath again; doubtless for my sorrow's sake. She maintained her patience as I have often seen a magnanimous cat do, when capriciously mauled by an infant.

“Lucy,” she said, gently, “I'm a-going to speak to 'e once more, an' then I've done. You've a-said as I don't understan' the ‘usages’——”

“ But I didn’t mean that, Esther,” I whimpered interrupting her.

“ ’Twere true, Lucy, wh’er you meäned it or no; but there’s some’at as I *do* understan’ :—I understands what ’tis to do a wrong: an’ I understands as the person as did it, ought to put it right. This here’s how ’twere :—A man loved ’e, Lucy, an’ said so; an’ that weren’t all, neither, you loved he back aggen, an’ you knows it !”

Esther paused here, and I looked away from her.

“ But, lo an’ behold,” she resumed, “ one o’ them okkard fits—one o’ th’ old sort, Lucy—come over ’e. Mind, I don’t say as no good comed out o’ the fit that time, ’cause I seed the good, what wi’ kippin’ down yer engry passions, an’ that; but a’ter aal, ’twere but a cart-afore-the-hoss religion. An’ so you wouldn’t have yer sweetheart, an’ sent of ’n off! This were so wrong, an’ so twisty, an’ so cruel as ever could be. An’ now you’ve a-begun to see as ’twere; an’ They up above have a-sent ’n near to ’e once more. Lucy, you tell ’n the truth. Never you mind what nobody do say of ’e, nor yet what nobody do think of ’e neither. You jest put yerself right—an’ lef” it.”

And then my nurse went on to urge me to write him “ ever so short ” a note, addressed to the “ Inn ” where we had seen him—asking him if he wished and cared to do it, to come and let me speak to him once more. And as I listened to her simple and unworldly counsel, I found my proud contumacy gradually yielding, and my heart swelling at the thought of happiness which even yet might visit it. Above all, I grew humbly sensible that I had, unwittingly, but none the less really, done Mr. Tyndal an injury which

it was incumbent on me if possible to repair ; that putting myself out of the question, I ought to let him know my regret for the refusal which I. had given him, whatever might be the result of the avowal.

But I relapsed many times into fear for my own dignity. I could not fail to see that there was another view of the question besides that which Esther entertained ; I doubted still whether right and modesty were entirely on her side. To one conclusion I soon came :—my mother must not be worried about this matter. She must be spared the discomfort of sharing my regrets and misgivings, whether my nurse's recommendation were followed or not.

Late in the afternoon, when I was alone in our little drawing-room—my mother being engaged upstairs—Esther surprised me by appearing in her bonnet and shawl. She shut herself in with me ; then brought the writing-materials to my side, and preparing a sheet of paper and a pen, said :—

“Now my chile, two or three lines : I'm ready to take 'em.”

To all intents and purposes I was in the nursery again at this moment. I felt the weight of Esther's authority just as I should have done had I been seven years of age, and she enjoining me to eat up my fat, on pain of losing my pudding. But nursery obedience was not always prompt ; there was a terrible delight in delaying the moment of compliance : nor did I now immediately do as I was bid ; and some pleasure attended the hesitation.

Seeing me procrastinate, Esther spoke again.

“ Well, Lucy,” she said, “ how long be ’e goin’ to kip me a-standin’ here wi’ my bonnet on ? ”

No answer nor movement.

“ Shall I give ’e five minutes, an’ then come back aggen ? ”

I took up the pen in pure perversity.

“ You’ve a-got a duty to do, Lucy ; an’ I’ll have it done,” said Esther, angrily.

Strange being that I am !—her anger melted me. Poor soul ! It was in her longing for *my* happiness, not through her intentness on any scheme for her own benefit, that her voice grew wrathful, and her face pale ! I wrote the address and date. After all, years improve us a little. Esther’s indignation would have alarmed, but it could not have touched me at seven years old.

Another seeming contradiction—I myself grew angry at the moment of yielding to my nurse’s will. “ There Esther, let me alone ! ” I said. “ I see you *must* have your way ! ”

I wrote rapidly thus :—

“ MY DEAR MR. TYNDAL,—

“ I HAVE been very unhappy since I saw you last. I scarcely know whether I am right in telling you so ; I hope I may be. If you at all wish to speak to me again, perhaps you will come here. I do not *ask* you to do this ; but I am anxious you should know that I regret what passed at Beremouth ; and that if you still want to see me, I am ready to receive you.

“ Your’s very sincerely,

“ L. FITZADAM.”

When I had finished, Esther showed a keen appreciation of the value of promptitude. Without giving me time to reflect, she herself sealed the note, and hastily bore it off.

No sooner was she gone, than dismay at my temerity seized me: I rushed to the front door and called after her. I am confident that she heard me; but without turning, she trudged on into the dark. Decency prohibited a pursuit: the deed was done now, and I must abide by the consequences.

When Esther came back I drove her half wild with questions. Was he there? No. When would he return? Uncertain. Would he return at all? Yes. Who took the note? A "young man." What did the "young man" say? The answers, hitherto patiently given, failed at this point.

Knowing now that my suspense might be prolonged, I became more excited. All the words that I had written came back to me, and they seemed the worst words I could have chosen;—at once splenetic and amorous; churlish, yet indelicate. I loathed the note; loathed myself for having written it; rated Esther, with sighs and groans, because she had caused its inditement.

Her patience did not fail now; nor did my unreasonableness. I railed at her; she soothed and heartened me. At last—probably weary of such a losing exchange—she left me alone; and my mother presently joining me, I was obliged once more to veil my feelings.

"My dear, you look pale to-night," said mamma.

"Yes? The weather is trying: our walk to-day too, was long."

“Do you feel tired love?”

“A little.”

“And your eyes are red! You have not been crying?”

I could not say “no;,” so I moved to the glass as if to verify the assertion on which the inquiry was based. I replied:—

“My eyes red? So they are rather: a sign, perhaps, that I ought to go early to bed. Dear mamma, it is past tea-time—let us have tea.”

I rang; and the conversation took a new course.

I spent that evening in inward trembling and compunction interspersed with a few pulses of hope. Outwardly I wore smiles; and my words were many—except when there came a knock at the front door, at which times my heart seemed to grow so big, that it frightened me into grave silence.

Would he return to his hotel to-night? If so, probably, not until a late hour. At this Christmas season he would, of course, be taking part in social festivities. Who could tell in what scenes of gaiety and merriment he might be moving at this very time? I thought of him, now as the life of some cheerful feast; now as gracing with his manly presence some brilliant ball. And my imagination did not stop here: it saw him with delicate Beauty leaning upon his arm: it heard him whisper tenderness into the willing ears of blushing Maidenhood: it beheld him appreciated, loved—as he deserved. Amidst such imaginings it was difficult indeed to believe that he could still think of or care for me—for me who had deliberately, and as

I now saw arrogantly, rejected him, with all his sterling qualifications.

I slept upon my doubts and pains, and woke with them. It was Christmas Day : I must be cheerful—or at least seem so. The effort to appear gay was laborious, but I sustained it. I was glad, however, when night relieved me from the endeavour.

He had not been : he had not written ! Once more I slept upon my doubts and pains : once more I woke with them.

CHAPTER III.

WHAT CAME OF TAKING ESTHER'S ADVICE.

Thou art turned to something strange,
And I have lost the links that bound
Thy changes.—*Tennyson*.

It was the twenty-sixth day of December. Breakfast was laid ; the tea made : I waited pensively, beside a bright fire which the chill morning rendered acceptable, for my mother to come down to the meal. Pensively ; but there are different kinds of pensiveness : and just now, perhaps by way of seeking relief from their recent painful occupation, my thoughts were attempting to recreate themselves in the open playground of speculation. They were fancifully peopling the white-hot caverns of the grate with a myriad invisible lives. They babbled of vast races engendered and developed amidst the transient glow ; of countless ambitions born, achievements buried there. They even joked of infinitesimal Love playing his pranks amongst the sentient atoms — until such time as we, the higher authorities, omitting to use the poker, should cause the entire system to cease, and so oblige him to decamp.

A slight sound stopped my imaginings : some second

person was in the room. I turned quickly, and found myself face to face with Mr. Tyndal.

I had not heard him below, nor on the stair. Was this Mr. Tyndal indeed?—he was not given to be noiseless. Decidedly I could not see through the figure; it could hardly therefore be that of a shadow or spectre: the hand offered me, moreover, had solidity and warmth: this was no ghost.

I took courage, for I considered that I had something to be thankful for already:—whatever might be the upshot of the visit, Mr. Tyndal had at any rate held me worth a call. Even if my letter had offended his taste, it had not finally excluded me from his consideration. With what intent I knew not—but he had obeyed my summons. At least my next parting with him need not be quite so wretched as my last.

Yet to know this, was not, I found, to know enough. I searched Mr. Tyndal's face—so far as searching can be accomplished in a single hurried glance—that I might learn more. He was changed. I find it hard to explain how; yet I am certain that I now looked upon a something which I had not seen before. All that had been, still was;—the wide good-natured mouth had lost none of its boylike amiability; the vermillion colouring whose vividness I so well remembered, had not paled, but remained to testify of unimpaired bodily health; the amber light from the eyes shone, as ever, bright and steady—the unaffected witness of feeling and common sense blended in just proportions. Yes: but there sat upon the brow a look, (shall I say of calmness and con-

tent?) with which I was unfamiliar—an appearance overmastering those attributes of the countenance that I had noted in the past. The man before me was indeed the man whom I had six months since rejected: but he was more. Something had been acquired, or enlarged, or improved: and the dim discovery of this was not without its disquieting effect upon my mind.

I cannot say positively by whom the conversation which now ensued was opened; but the first words that I can recal were my own. I was seated on the sofa: Mr. Tyndal stood near me, grave and still.

“I do not know,” I said, “I cannot even guess, whether I have done right indeed; but I have tried. I am sure that my letter was ill-expressed: will you forgive, and if you can, forget, the awkward words I used?”

“I did not think them awkward, Miss Fitzadam,” said Mr. Tyndal in a tone that was cool, yet kind.

“My only hope was,” I proceeded, finding it impossible to show my face any longer, and hiding it, accordingly, with my hands, “that your generosity would give me credit for a right motive, although the propriety and good taste of my act might be open to question: I trust it has done so?”

“It has, Miss Fitzadam,” responded Mr. Tyndal, “and further, I hold that the motive impelled you to a just and proper course.”

If it relieved me to learn this, far more did it pain me to note the manner of the declaration, which, though not ungentle, was chill, distant, and formal. But at the same

time this want of heartiness aroused my spirit, and shaped my rejoinder.

"Good," I said shortly; "then let me have your forgiveness, and let us part friends."

"With all my heart, Miss Fitzadam," said Mr. Tyndal. "Am I to go?"

"As you please, sir."

There was anger in my bosom—and something else too. A movement of my visitor decided which passion was to gain the mastery. Mr. Tyndal took his hat and walked to the door. It was too much. Grief rose and swelled: indignant pride tottered and fell down:—I cried bitterly.

"A lamentable and humiliating lapse," remarks the well-bred reader. I am not sure of that. I succumbed to the flood reluctantly enough at the time: I could readily have taken vengeance on my eyes for betraying me, had that been possible. But after all I do not see that I lost anything by the sudden inundation which was really worth the keeping.

Undoubtedly my tears produced some not unacceptable results. Mr. Tyndal came back from the door; put down his hat; and spoke again—spoke rather more feelingly than before.

"Nay," he said, "I will not leave you without any sort of explanation; such a departure would hardly be '*friendly*.' Have I your permission, Miss Fitzadam, to sit down and tell a story?"

"Of course," I sobbed.

He sat down. There was a pause. I stole another

peep at his face ; I gathered no confidence or encouragement from the glance. From beneath a brow as still as summer night, now darted forth such restless brightness as haunts the perilous morass, or heralds an advancing thunder storm. Promises so ambiguous were not to be trusted. I did not trust them. I only sighed—and waited.

“ You cannot, Miss Fitzadam,” began my visitor, “ you cannot by any possibility have forgotten my—my—age ? ”

Miss Fitzadam had not forgotten it ; and so she said. “ But,” she added, “ you are very unkind to refer to that, Mr. Tyndal.”

“ Unkind ? Not so, I assure you. The reference was necessary. It is my object to remind you in the first place, Miss Fitzadam, that when a man has reached his thirty-seventh year, love—I ask pardon for the expression—is not the same thing to him that it was at one-and-twenty.”

“ No,” I answered, painfully following the path of thought into which I was directed, “ it is of course far less absorbing. It is doubtless a moderated passion then : it ‘ waits upon the judgment.’ It may supply an agreeable adjunct to the existing pleasures of life ; but it is no longer the soul and essence of them all.”

“ Bless me ! Miss Fitzadam,” said Mr. Tyndal, rising, and pacing the floor with a tread of more than ordinary rapidity, “ you speak as though you were upwards of thirty-six yourself. Possessing as you do such accurate knowledge of the inward experiences belonging to that time of life, I own you encourage me to believe that my narrative

will be heard by you with the largest indulgence. I ought to thank my stars I am sure. Let me take heart, and proceed boldly on my way. I find it no inviting road; yet you generously do what you can to make it passable."

I listened with a sad wonder. I had nothing to say. My tears began to flow again.

"Remembering, then," resumed Mr. Tyndal, "my particular age, and the supremacy of Judgment over Feeling which belongs to it, you will be fully prepared to learn that when I had received your cool, polite, decisive letter of dismissal——"

"Please do not refer to that unhappy letter, Mr. Tyndal," I faltered.

"Pardon me, I cannot explain myself without doing so, and that pointedly,—That when I had received your dismissal, I found myself not wholly destitute of the means for sustaining my disappointment, and for beguiling my grief."

If not "fully prepared" for this statement, I could not consistently show, nor indeed reasonably feel, surprise thereat. I waited in growing dejection to hear out the dismal story of Affection's decline; to watch the sun of my hope descend to the dusky horizon; to mark the ebb of that tide which, taken at its flood, might have upborne me on its bosom, and floated me to peace.

"Yes," proceeded Mr. Tyndal, apparently gathering confidence and volubility as he went on; "in my emergency—I have no wish to conceal that such I found it (at the time)—Judgment asserted and maintained her sway. She allied herself with Philosophy. And, think you,

could Passion successfully withstand such a coalition? No; under the government of the august pair I revived, hoped, resolved; revived—from a certain stupor which Passion would have prolonged; hoped—for compensation for my loss; resolved—to win it.

“My resources,” continued Mr. Tyndal, still pacing the room, “were many and various; let me name a few: there were the intellectual, to begin with. I had already found encouragement in literary pursuits; I bethought me that I would follow them with new zeal. I did so. I wrote and published a book. It succeeded. Picture to yourself, Miss Fitzadam, the healing, the satisfaction, of this result!”

He paused. While I was musing, a fire kindled within me, which dried my tears, and found vent in words of burning wrath.

“A mighty void it must have been, sir,” I cried, in a high and tremulous voice, “that could be so easily and so early filled; a most tremendous wound your heart must have sustained, considering the speedy operation and feeble nature of the remedy!”

He stood still, and I looked at him. I saw a smile stir his moustache; the yellow lightning flashed from his eyes with redoubled brightness. He said quietly, raising his forefinger,—

“Consider, Miss Fitzadam, I am relating to you the experiences of six-and-thirty. But let me display to you the further resources that I found at my disposal. Judgment and Philosophy, you know, do not necessarily forbid or discountenance Friendship: Friendship proved, to me, another valuable resort. I sedulously cultivated its fra-

grant flowers. Fortunately, notwithstanding some lesser losses—and alas! Miss Fitzadam, one immeasurable one—I could still number amongst my acquaintances, several who invited me to a closer intimacy. I sought them out. I made their thoughts and ways my own. And again I had my reward: I found that, possessing Friendship, I was possessed of a new amulet against the witchcraft of Passion.”

Once more my tears flowed fast: but it was the reference to my dead brother that had provoked them now. Again Mr. Tyndal halted in his cruel and mortifying tale. I hoped it was ended: but my hope was vain: eftsoons he resumed it thus:—

“I need not dwell upon all the separate ingredients in the grand compensation which I sought and found: one more, however, I must name. It was unlike the rest: it arose amidst them; but it owned the power to pervade, and at last to transcend them all. See, now, how Fortune requited me! I had learned of Reason and Sense to acquiesce in her deprivation: doubtless the blindfold lady is in the habit of slyly peeping through her bandages—as I am afraid I used to do at *Blind-man's-buff*—how else can you account for the fact that she rewarded my resignation by giving me back a possession similar to that of which she had despoiled me? It is true. I became aware that a beauteous maiden—probably on the whole the loveliest girl I have ever seen—had paid me the compliment of being pleased with me. I need not say how I learned this: it is enough to confess that I made the discovery. Women have, as you know, a thousand ways of expressing their

approval of men, without necessarily compromising their dignity, or overstepping the bounds of womanly delicacy. Can you wonder, Miss Fitzadam, if gradually, but surely I fell under this new spell? Can you wonder if the tenderness of another beautiful girl was all the more acceptable in contrast to your own harshness? Can you blame me if I forgot your rebuff, in the loving reception accorded me elsewhere?"

As he finished he stood still before me—the pacing had been resumed as the climax of the tale approached. Tranquil, collected, dignified women, henceforward despise and condemn me! At this moment, say you, my demeanour should have been stately, firm, reserved: I was bent in an agony of resistless tears. My lips, you tell me, should have spoken a few cool words of apology for my mistaken summons, pointed with a trenchant sneer at the style of the concluded story: not a syllable, sense or nonsense, cold or cutting, could I utter. Finally you affirm that with a calm and immoveable countenance, a distant bend, and a step of mingled grace and resolution, I should have vanished from the sight of the unmannerly and insulting Mr. Tyndal: on the contrary, I remained a fixture upon the sofa, betraying to his eye, in every vibration of my trembling frame, the depths of the chagrin, sorrow, and remorse which his recital had caused me.

Reader, I have some pride; but in competition with my longing for happiness, or my sorrow at its loss, that pride has always been beaten. I have too, or I am told that I have, an aspect generally self-possessed and serene: on this matter I feel bound to remark, first, that the self-

possession and serenity have probably always existed much more in appearance than in truth; and second, that on several crucial occasions—of which that above described, is, I need scarcely say, a notable example—the semblance no less than the reality of them has been entirely wanting. Thus much to reconcile certain seeming inconsistencies of self-delineation, which may be detected by the attentive peruser of these pages.

“Now,” I inwardly muttered; “I understand the signs which I see upon Mr. Tyndal’s face for the first time to-day. That unruffled acquiescent brow—erst so restless and inquisitive—denotes simply a large problem solved, an important end reached: a loveable woman’s love won and enjoyed: that vivid, restless fire of eye, marks the implacable ferocity of the inconstant man towards his hapless former love; it speaks a resolve to punish, to give pain for pain, to exact from a helpless debtor, payment to the uttermost farthing.”

“Miss Fitzadam, shall I go now?”

Could I trust my voice for a steady and connected reply? I doubted; but I made the attempt to speak; and fairly succeeded.

“Is it not nearly time, sir? What more can you wish to effect by staying—having already caused me so much unhappiness? Go, by all means; and perhaps you may condescend to ask yourself hereafter, whether your heartless treatment of me to-day has rested upon any sufficient justification.”

I faltered again as I finished: my soul sank back into a slough of sorrow and compunction. Anger towards

my former suitor became rapidly mingled with anger towards myself: in heart, if not in words, I owned Lucy Fitzadam as the chief wrong-doer.

A caressing touch upon my shoulder; a whisper in my ear :—" Lucy."

I started—turned. An arm was about me. What meant this? Mr. Tyndal was seated at my side. His eye beamed and flashed close upon my face: his lips were white with emotion: his voice shook.

" Lucy," he said, " there could be but one ' justification ' for my cold and bitter words. Here it is :—they were the tentative essay of jealous and unaltered love. The farce is finished now : it has lasted quite long enough for me. Kiss me Lucy. Let us henceforth be ' friends ' and lovers. I love you with a love that has never known, since first I possessed it, and that never can know, so long as life endures, one moment's interruption, nor one tittle of diminution. I believe now that you love me too. Very good ! Let me at this point offer a new version of the ' tentative ' tale."

What wide extremes of feeling lie within the compass of a single master-passion ! How brief a space of time, too, how inconsiderable a change of outward circumstance, will suffice to carry one completely across the mighty circle ! A few seconds ; a gentle touch ; a phrase or two of tenderness, had transported me from Erebus to the empyrean ; had given me honey for gall ; hope, calm, and charity, for despair, distraction, and resentment : yet the state of my heart towards Mr. Tyndal had undergone no essential change.

It was not in me now to dally or dissemble. If not prepared to administer, I had no objection to receive, a kiss. I received one. All my behaviour was of the same compliant kind. I allowed my head to stay—where it was, viz., on Mr. Tyndal's shoulder. What broken words I spoke, signified pure contentment.

I slowly grew calm: during the process, the new version of the "tale" stood over; when I had entirely regained my composure, it was offered to me again; and now I eagerly accepted, and listened to, the narrative.

"I began," said Mr. Tyndal, "by saying that when a man has reached his thirty-seventh year, love is not the same thing to him that it was at one-and-twenty. This is true."

"Is it, Mr. Tyndal?" I asked doubtingly.

"Yes, Miss Fitzadam; but not for the reasons suggested by your matured and penetrating wisdom! It is not the same indeed; for it is altogether wider, deeper, more durable! It is just so much better than the earlier fancies, as ripe manhood, thoughtful, patient, tolerant, humble, is better than heedless, headstrong, censorious, and vaunting youth. Will that do, so far?"

"Yes, Mr. Tyndal."

"I went on to declare that I called Judgment and Philosophy to my aid against the tyranny of Passion: so I did. I believed that Providence would one day give me the desire of my heart: I saw that meanwhile I was called on to learn a lesson of patience; I endeavoured to learn it. To this end I diverted my mind by all means at my disposal. I wrote; and succeeded in my writing. I

asked you, Lucy, to picture to yourself the healing, the satisfaction of this success. If you coloured your picture a little too vividly, was that any fault of mine?"

Here I made a sound between laughter and crying, such as proceeding from an infant denotes returning confidence, or amiability, or submission, after the temporary absence of those becoming attributes. I felt the extreme juvenility of the manifestation, and was ashamed of it; but it did not seem to displease my companion.

"I told you further," continued Mr. Tyndal, "that I had recourse to friendship for consolation under my disappointment. Here again I spoke truth. Have you never, Lucy, in regretting some lost treasure, been led to study, and so to estimate more justly than before, the worth of possessions still within your reach? This was what happened to me now. In my desolation I was visited by memories of disinterested kindnesses, of handsome words, of hearty grasps of the hand, of sympathetic lines sent from long distances. I saw a value in these tokens that I had perhaps somewhat overlooked before. I strove to revive and cherish the spirit they displayed; to extend the scope, and to enhance the warmth of my regard. Honestly, I reaped a large harvest of comfort from the endeavour."

"And now," I here remarked, "we come to the story of the beautiful young lady."

"Now," repeated Mr. Tyndal, "we come to the story of the beautiful young lady."

Either my jealous fancy fabled, or a faithful instinct within me veraciously prophesied, that my companion had

suddenly become reluctant to proceed ; that a point in his narrative had been gained, beyond which he could not express himself with perfect candour. Finding that the tale lagged, I spurred it with questions.

“Is the young lady,” I asked, “really as beautiful as you described her, Mr. Tyndal?”

“On my honour she is; to the full.”

“Do you admire her beauty?”

“I admire all beauty.”

“May I ask the style of hers?”

“Certainly. She is a blonde. Her complexion is brilliant; her hair golden; her eyes are soft—grey in hue, and shadowed with dark lashes; her ——”

“Is she very fond of you?”

“Why, yes—she is,” (hesitating).

“And how did you find that out, Mr. Tyndal?”

“A mystery for future revelation, Lucy! Now, cannot you express what further curiosity you may feel about this damsel, in a single question more?”

No; I could not. Mr. Tyndal did not understand the detailed nature of a woman's inquisitiveness. I thought, however, that I knew of an interrogatory which, as setting forth the *gist* of my doubts, might, if it should receive a favourable answer, terminate my inquiries. I had a good mind to withhold this question; for, after a little reflection I saw reason to believe that it was the identical one which Mr. Tyndal had invited. He was at his old trick of *finding me out* again! Nevertheless, I forgave him, and said:—

“You say that this young lady is very fond of you: do you—Mr. Tyndal—do you, care for her?”

It seemed that he had got what he wanted—the selfish exorbitant man!

“Care for her!” he cried, hugging me in a manner that I was obliged to resist; “not one whit, my angel! Not one jot—tittle—particle—”

And here he completely shut up the subject of the beautiful young lady by kisses and other endearments. My heart, if not my mind, was satisfied.

A good deal more was said. Amongst other things it was remarked that Mr. Tyndal’s “little Puritan” had come out into God’s sunshine again. She no longer thought it needful to dwell alone in dens and caves of the earth—desolate, afflicted, tormented. Was she willing now to join herself to a worldling?

“Not to a worldling, Mr. Tyndal,” she answered, “but to you.”

In about five minutes’ time I started up. It astonished me to find that in that short interval the fire had nearly gone out: “what a little day,” I thought, for my Plutonic races! It struck me as being singular, also, that the urn was almost cold, and the teapot quite so.

I ran up-stairs, and found my mother and Esther together. It was strange, but I could not fail to see that they were awaiting the news I had to tell: their studied indifference of manner as I arrived, betrayed their eagerness for my announcement. How had they learned the

position of affairs below? I was ignorant; but I saw that they understood it, and I told my story.

To that story my mother responded with kisses and blessings. As for Esther, the only acknowledgments of my tidings vouchsafed by her, consisted in a satisfied twinkling of her cool brown eyes, and in an accession to her zeal on practical points. Having executed some rapid and decided feats in the way of setting-to-rights, she departed to prepare a second breakfast. "I'll be boun'," she said as she left the room, "as that there big gen'leman have a-got a appetite."

A few words from my mother now made known to me that Esther, accidentally seeing Mr. Tyndal as he approached the house, had herself admitted him, and directed him where to find me; also, that the old woman, judging from his visit that her wish was gained, had then told my mother what I, at her instance, had done. Thus were explained, both my mother's acquaintance with my late anxieties and present relief, and that immunity from interruption which had marked the scene down-stairs.

It was a time much to be remembered—of rest after unquiet; of hope new-born from desponding self-blame; of spontaneous gratitude to Heaven. Before I went back to Mr. Tyndal I found opportunity to bend my knees, and to give thanks in words for my great happiness. There was but little Calvinism in the thanksgiving. Shall I venture to hint that on this very morning another new leaf was turned in my religious history? I think it is true. Hitherto this or that man of goodness and power had swayed me to the acceptance of his own particular faith;

my religion had been derived from others. Henceforth my belief was my own. It came to me through the medium of my own observation and experience; it was mingled with my own blessings and misfortunes, my own duties, difficulties, and delights. Enough, however, of the matter in this place. Be it only noted that my first inducement to study in the new school was—a Mercy; my first lesson therein—a lesson of Confidence.

After a hasty effort to decorate myself suitably to the occasion, I went down-stairs again. My mother was already with Mr. Tyndal; they had gone through all preliminary congratulations and explanations, and the conversation was now easy and homelike.

I never saw a man eat as Mr. Tyndal ate that morning. It was fortunate that Esther had entertained large conceptions of his appetite, and no less so that her provision was on the same scale as her estimate. She ministered to our guest with a pride and satisfaction that found a quiet but forcible expression in the mild beaming of her large eyes, and in the silent alacrity of her movements. I believe that she was proud of his hearty appetite itself. Certainly as she handed him a fresh plate of toast, and brought in for his special eating a second edition of grilled turkey, I could easily have imagined her saying to herself,—“He aint none o’ them narrar threadpaper chaps as puts nothing into theirselves, an’ as wouldn’t be no credit to their victuals if they did; he’ve a-got a fine figure of a man to show for what he do eat, an’ he do eat finely: so much the better.”

During the meal I learned how it happened that Mr.

Tyndal was in London. His family, it proved, were in town lodgings on account of his father's failing health, which called for eminent medical advice ; and he had run up from the country to spend Christmas-day with them ; at the time when I had seen him through the hotel-window, he had just arrived. The same afternoon he had joined his friends, returning to his hotel late in the evening of Christmas-day—when my note had reached him : thus, he had obeyed its summons at the earliest possible moment. He did not tell me now—but I heard of it afterwards—what various pains and desires the unexpected vision of his contumacious “ Puritan ” had cost him.

I further discovered before breakfast was over, that but for my note, Mr. Tyndal would by this time have been far on his road to the north of England. His business engagements, he told me, would necessarily take him at once to the manufacturing districts, and keep him there for several months to come. Even for me he could not venture to sacrifice more than this one day to pleasure: he was not a man, as I soon found, to entertain Enjoyment while Duty stood begging at his door ; nay, to fill that hungry one with good things was to him, I verily believe, to feast Enjoyment too. My unworthier self grew jealous of Mr. Tyndal's profession at an early period of our engagement.

I made the most of that happy day. Sweet and wonderful was the knowledge that I had part and lot in the crisp brown curls, and fresh comely countenance ; but sweeter and more wonderful still was the realization that the spirit inhabiting that singularly well-favoured tenement

was tenderly and deeply affected on my behalf. We talked much: of the future:—and the coming summer, it was agreed, should unite us; of the past:—and no laments for bygone severance, said Mr. Tyndal, should occupy our minds. Mr. Knox and his teaching were mentioned. I found that my lover was no scoffer, no thoughtless railer at religion and its professors. I perceived that at heart he entertained a gentle respect for all true belief. But he made light of theological systems, and had bad names for mere wordy religionists. Polemics were his horror; and he attempted no concealment of the fact. We did not, however, dive deeply into these matters. Our conversation was mainly of that personal kind which was to be expected from people in our situation: subjects were engrossing in proportion as they bore upon our relations to each other. My father's illness was referred to in hushed tones; it was decreed that his recovery should be immediate and complete. My lover's sisters were verbally introduced to me; they were to call upon me the next day, and were to become my fast friends. Letters were to be exchanged between Mr. Tyndal and me twice a week at least; they were to be long letters: they were to be——

Hush! I am in danger of reflecting too closely in my description the exclusive spirit of those first hours of my engagement. Let me pass on. The day fled, as days will fly. Cloaked and muffled to meet the frosty night air, Mr. Tyndal at last gave me farewell in the gas-lit hall. He was cheery and sportive in his manner; I felt a little sad, and wondered at his spirits.

Before the final word I ventured a shy whispered question :—

“ When will you tell me all about the ‘ beautiful young lady ? ’ ”

Mr. Tyndal laughed ; but I am certain a cloud shadowed his face for a moment.

“ Lucy,” he said, “ I begin to doubt the wisdom of my reference to that personage. Be content with this assurance :—the latter part of my tale this morning, was, like its earlier portions, specially coloured for ‘ tentative ’ purposes ; but the conclusion would be less easy to translate into plain truth than the rest. Do you mind allowing the ‘ beautiful young lady ’ to stand over ? ”

“ Indefinitely ? —Not if you wish it.”

CHAPTER IV.

FULNESS OF JOY.

I fear
My soul hath her content so absolute
That not another comfort like to this
Succeeds in unknown fate.—*Othello.*

WHEN Mr. Tyndal was gone, I began to examine my happiness, and all that had occurred in relation to it, with minute care. As some vain lass in new attire will use extra looking-glasses for its inspection, will scan it before, behind, on this side and on that; will sail past the mirror, to learn its effect on the casual observer, will closely study flounce and trimming as with the eye and thought of her lover or admirers: so I summoned imagination to my assistance, that I might view my newly-acquired delight from every point; so as its possessor I strictly weighed my worth in the estimation of others, and thoughtfully dwelt upon the value of each separate item in my acquisition. The vain girl concludes of course that her dress becomes her: I held that the habiliments of love and happiness became me.

A hundred times I again went through the breakfast-room scene: with the difference that I now always said

what I ought to have said at the right moment ; wept much more profusely, spoke much more warmly, towards the close of the interview : and at its commencement, behaved with a sad reserve that in its dignified tenderness resembled the original performance to the most trifling extent imaginable. Mr. Tyndal's face, as it had appeared on that occasion, underwent, a hundred times, a microscopic scrutiny ; in the placid and collected aspect which the brow had worn, I learned to trace the signs of large Patience, acquired by means of painful Experience ; in that intermittent flaming of the eyes which I had noted, I now joyfully espied the tokens of eager love chafing under the imposition of an uncongenial disguise.

I will not take upon myself to aver that amidst these manifold resuscitations the " beautiful young lady " never arose from the dead. On the contrary she often terrified me by appearing before my fancy, arrayed in too, too solid flesh. At these times, however, I treated her with decision ; I chid her, smote her on the forehead, slew her, replaced her in the tomb ; and at last, hewing a weighty slab from the rock of Mr. Tyndal's word, I laid it upon her sepulchre, and thus coercing her into quietude saw her no more for a long while.

So egotistical is Love, he is seldom content to enjoy himself and his possessions in silence ; he asserts his blessedness loudly, demands a witness to his exploits, and insists that the witness shall sing their praises. Fond of communicating his delight, he peremptorily requires for it recognition and honour. Under his influence, I now often called upon my dear mother to testify to the unequalled

merits of my hero, and the supreme beatitude of my lot. She, doubtless repressing a consciousness of extravagance in my appeals, (naturally quick at the detection of such exaggeration, she was ever ready to conceal her impressions when she thought that my happiness was bound up in the concealment) humoured my humour, rejoiced at my rejoicing, deified my deity. It strikes me now that she might, without injustice, have reminded me of her own recognition of my lover's merit at a time when I had practically disputed it. "Did I not urge," she might reasonably have said, "the worth which you so strongly insist on now, or at least a considerable portion of it, when you were bent on your rejection of Mr. Tyndal last summer? Did I not then, when in act you contradicted me, affirm that he was deserving of your best regard, and fit to be your husband?" No such retributive words ever passed her lips; no thought, I am certain, did she once entertain of which they might have been the offspring. She had no desire so to justify herself and to inculcate me. Her only care was to follow closely in the track of my own happy fancies; to enlarge the borders of every joy I felt, and to put my every doubt to shame. One especial doubt, I remember,—as sudden in visiting my mind as it was unwelcome there,—she was able to replace by a new and unlooked-for satisfaction; it was a misgiving as to whether Mr. Tyndal, after having heard of my father's illness, and of the changes wrought in our circumstances thereby, would, uninvited, have really desired to renew negotiations with me. I had no reason whatever for permitting such a doubt a moment's shelter in my bosom; yet there the worthless impostor crept, and

there awhile, to my great disquietude, he took up his abode. I now marvelled that, before obeying Esther's behest, I had not thought of our changed position as affording an argument for additional resistance to her command; I felt sure that had I done so, I should have continued refractory. It was a blest relief to learn that Mr. Tyndal had fully known of my father's illness and its probable results, before the scene between us at Beremouth: such information my mother was able to give me.

Mr. Tyndal's mother and sisters lost no time in calling upon us. We liked them; forthwith returned their call; and were soon on terms of intimacy with the whole party. Of the younger ladies only—Charlotte and Bessy Tyndal—does my tale demand special mention. They were comely, sprightly, not unaccomplished. Their youth was gone: they knew it; and submitting gracefully and unaffectedly to the loss, they attracted still, by the legitimate means at the disposal of their riper years. In character, as in person, they were strikingly alike. Generous, frank, confiding, they readily called forth affection, and warmly reciprocated it. Some faults they had—and who is without them? but “even their failings leaned to virtue's side:”—they were a little too generous, too unsuspecting, too indulgent: I never discovered anything more to their discredit than this.

Through the instrumentality of these new friends, I now saw more of society than I had ever done before. I was happy; and was therefore able to enjoy the gaities devised for my amusement. Not long since, I should have denounced some of these entertainments as essentially

worldly ; should have taken part in them with protestations and trembling. Now I went everywhere hoping to find aids to improvement, and beauty for admiration. I was not disappointed. I learned by experience that there are wise and helpful Ministers of the Most High who have never been ordained ; that the loveliness of Divine virtue may appear to gladden and elevate the soul—provided only that soul be, or try to be, humble and honest—amidst scenes which make no pretence of exhibiting it.

In due time my engagement was formally announced to relatives and friends in general ; and now each post brought many written compliments and good wishes. Of all the congratulatory letters I received, none was warmer nor more moving than that of Ralph Thain : to none did I accord a heartier welcome. I found that the firm yet elegant handwriting still owned for me a peculiar fascination ; and that the thoughts which obtained so clear and powerful an expression in the neat, careful sentences, were indeed original and pathetic—just as I had believed Ralph's thoughts to be of old.

Why was it, that, having finished the perusal of the epistle, I experienced a feeling of sadness bordering on apprehension ? Not a phrase or a word in the letter directly tended to create such a feeling. I faced the problem of the melancholy misgiving, and determined to solve it. I convinced myself that I suspected the commencement in Ralph's fastidious mind, of a process of disenchantment with reference to his wife. His enthusiasm towards his "graceful bride" appeared to me, I discovered, to be wanting in spontaneity : his tenderly chivalrous

mention of her struck me, I perceived, as having been penned by way of a kind of manifesto against counter suggestions of disparagement arising within his breast. As, however, my suspicions rested upon no positive evidence, I made great efforts to be rid of them: but these endeavours were only moderately successful; it was, unhappily but too likely that Margaret, unstable, vain, now cynical, now worldly; not indeed without right impulses, but fickle in her obedience to them—would sooner or later dissatisfy the earnest, intense, and exigent nature of the man to whom she had so inexplicably united herself.

The letter set me thinking, further, how singularly ill-adapted must Margaret be, to encounter the dulness of that grave old house in Westford, and to succour the infirmities of her husband's stricken father. I pictured her to myself listlessly pacing the faded drawing-room; presiding with a cold silence at the family meals; deputing to servants the task of tending the invalid. But no more of my picture! I afterwards discovered that it was, in several particulars at least, untrue to reality. I came to know—when the knowledge was as sad as it was precious—that Margaret's failures in her early married life had not been so many, nor so great, as my uncharitableness had depicted them; that some sweet and gentle sentiments towards the Aged and Sick—sentiments the manifestation of which had imparted blessing, and which could not therefore, have left the place of their conception wholly unblessed—had arisen in her heart at that season.

The days flew by now. February came: the shop

windows were gay with painted cupids and flowers. I received a valentine—and sent one. In some respects I gained far more than I bestowed; for the gift conferred on me embraced lace, and gilding, and various blossoms in relief; whereas I gave but an unpretending sketch of a single clustered bloom, whose united little blue family, dwindling to pink baby-buds at the top, was delineated by fingers which though they loved their task, were certainly not clever at it. I flattered myself, however, that what my offering lacked in artistic and material worth, might be recompensed by the sterling nature of the spirit in which I offered it: indeed I held that in its rectified essence, my gift was rather superior to my lover's than otherwise. At the same time I found vast stores of delight in the beauteous and dainty blossoms in relief: the gilding, to me, was solid gold; and the lace, far more precious than costliest Honiton or Brussels.

It was about this time, that passing through one of the squares near our lodgings, I suddenly came upon a well-remembered sound and a well-remembered form: the sound was no more musical or refined than that of creaking stays; the form was the form of Mrs. Rivers, our former cook; and the matron was engaged in scrubbing the steps of a dwelling-house. I made myself known; but under some difficulties, for Mrs. Rivers at first pretended and protested that there must be some mistake, miss, and that she couldn't say, really. When, however, the light *did* penetrate her mind, in other words, when she found it impracticable to affect non-acquaintance any longer, her greeting was so dramatic as to be quite confusing. The

truth was, she considered step-scrubbing a duty not only beneath her, but foreign to the post she held; and she had disliked to be recognized while busy on that derogatory and alien occupation. This I easily gathered from her subsequent remarks, which were devoted to complaint of an exacting fellow-servant named 'Lizabeth, who, it seemed, required of her the performance of several humiliating offices beyond her province; as, the washing up of a certain milk-jug clearly to be classed with breakfast things (with which she—Mrs. Rivers—had nothing to do) although it might not be of the same ware as they; and the scrubbing of “these here front steps,” and the stairs down into the study behind:—duties which it was sufficient only to name, as it appeared, to prove them far removed from, as well as vastly beneath, the legitimate avocations of a cook.

Feeling my usual pleasure at the sight of an old face, I endeavoured to humour and conciliate Mrs. Rivers, and expressed a moderate astonishment at the gross injustice to which she was subjected in reference to the milk-jug. By such means I presently brought her round to a frame of great cordiality; and when we parted, we had attained to such friendly relations, that I gave her my address, and asked her to come in and see us the first time she might have the opportunity.

She did come, on the following Sunday; and my mother and I talked to her, or it would be more correct to say listened to her talk, for a considerable time. She was told of my engagement, and pledged me and my future husband in the glass of port wine with which we regaled her. Before the administration of the stimulant she had

been somewhat stiff in her manner ; disposed to dwell with an air of superiority upon the wealth and position of her present master—who, as she had alleged for the settlement of all doubts in reference to his exalted rank, was “ in Chancery ; ” and slightly disparaging in her allusions to life at Westford. But when a few sips of the wine had been sipped, she relaxed ; fondly recalled past scenes in the kitchen at home ; and mentioned to us at last that she did not speak the words from flattery nor yet from favour, but that she must confess ours to have been the best place she had ever been in. What with freedom, she said, and what with liberty to do as you liked, and not bein’ interfered with, and having your own way (in moderation) she would stick to it always, even if she were to live a hundred years or more, that Mrs. Fitzadams’s service [Rivers had generally added an *s* to our surname] was the best as she’d ever know’d. My mother, probably remembering many instances in which she had found it needful to repress Rivers’s love for freedom of action, looked rather uncomfortable at this complimentary declaration ; and to change the subject, inquired whether our late cook had ever heard anything of Mary Murgatroyd, since the girl’s dismissal from our house. Upon this Mrs. Rivers grew silent and mysterious. She held her chin thoughtfully ; patted her lips with her forefinger ; shook her head. “ Well, ma’am,” she slowly remarked at last, “ if it’s your wishes as I should say, I *will* say :—I *have* a-heard something of Mary since you parted with the gell.”

Had my mother encouraged further revelations, we might doubtless have learned a good deal respecting the

poor little maiden referred to ; and I should not have been sorry to gain such information ; for Mr. Tyndal's sisters, to whom Mary owed her bringing up, had expressed to me a fear that some serious mischief had befallen the girl—which fear indeed I had already myself entertained, since the report of Arthur Bayley. However, mamma appeared but little interested in the subject ; and it therefore soon fell through. On the whole, Mrs. Rivers's departure, which my mother had perhaps designed to hasten by her show of incuriosity, and which now took place, was not unwelcome. We had been glad, for the sake of auld lang syne, to see the woman again ; but her sense of the rights of her class was so heavy, and her consciousness of its duties so slight, that intercourse with her had proved monotonous, and its cessation was pleasant.

A little further on our devoted servant Bayley paid us a second call. A few days' holiday had been granted him, and he was going home. The joy involved in these facts was such as he could not refrain from imparting to us : he came bubbling over with delight, and set forth his happiness eloquently. He told us before leaving, that shortly after the visit of my enemy George Body to London, the Secretary of the *Universal Live Stock Insurance Office* had hastily and unaccountably dismissed that personage from the post which he had previously held, as local Inspector to the Society.

The month of March brought us cheering tidings of improvement in old Mr. Thain's health. We heard too that in proportion as his strength of body increased, there grew within his mind a desire to repeat his visit to my

father. It seemed that this desire sometimes oppressed him in an extraordinary degree: Ralph wrote of it in a tone of mystery and reverence. It was thought that at the beginning of April the old man might be allowed to indulge his wish; and arrangements were made that if his state continued to improve, he should come up to stay under our roof at that time. A strange feeling of awe and wonder filled my mind on learning of Mr. Thain's longing. Whence did it arise? What might it foreshadow? The influence of our old friend's presence and sympathy upon the invalid had already been strikingly beneficial; was it rational to hope that this revived desire for communication with my father was the presage of a further exercise of salutary power?

My own future now began to assume a more definite shape. It was settled that early in April I should pay a visit to Mr. Tyndal's aunts at Westford; at their house Mr. Tyndal himself was to meet me; and he hoped to be able so to arrange his business as to see me many times in the course of my stay. The month spoken of for our marriage was July; but a remembrance, perhaps needlessly vivid, of the promise which I had made to my father at the outset of his illness, to the effect that he alone should give me away at my wedding, induced me to demur and to defer.

And now we stood upon the threshold of April. Here reader, pen in hand I pause, draw a long breath, feel a strange fluttering at the heart: for the emotions of the days I am about to recal, revisit me as I approach their description. Suffer me to linger for a moment, and look

back over that happy three months to which in the present chapter I have briefly adverted. How wonderful a time it was! So bright with Heaven-sent blessing, it might, I think, have lighted me through all succeeding darkness; so ominous in its calm repose, it should have taught me to look for coming storm. I simply, deeply enjoyed it; and like a spendthrift, found its generous wealth sufficient only for my present uses, nor sought to store its gifts against a possible penury to come.

CHAPTER V.

PURGATORIAL GLOOM.

A fog made tow'rds us, dark as night.
There was no room for 'scaping ; and that mist
Bereft us both of sight and the pure air.

DANTE'S *Purgatory*. (Cary's translation).

APRIL opened. I counted the days ; each morning joyfully striking off a new figure from the calendar like a school-girl who watches for the holidays ; and holding the falling fragments of time no worthier of regret than the sculptor his chisel-chips, as they drop and let him pass nearer to his ideal. I was preparing for my lover a love-gift of my own workmanship to present at our meeting. One morning, being without materials for the farther prosecution of this undertaking, I begged my mother to let me go out and buy them. This was before breakfast. After some hesitation she acceded to my wish. I went ; accomplished my errand, and returned with a light heart and blithe step.

Nearing our lodgings I saw to my surprise that my mother and Esther were stationed at the front door fixedly watching my approach. Before I was close enough to know that both faces were pale as ashes, and that each eye

flamed with the ardour of an inward pain too hot for tears, I clearly understood, from the very inclination of the forms, that something was the matter. Keen, tense, impatient was the attitude both of my mother and my nurse; it was, I thought, the attitude of persons who have received intelligence of some dire distress, and who wait in an agony of fearful desire, to make known the tidings to one who *must* learn them, and whom they may destroy. In a few moments my mind's eye had swept a wide horizon of possible disaster. My fancy invented numberless hideous combinations of evil which, thank God, have never come to pass; and it completely failed to suggest that form of trouble which was about to be disclosed to me as my own.

I reached the house; was silently led into the breakfast-room, and received from my mother a long slip of paper, on which I saw both printing and writing. I was bewildered enough indeed; yet I had sufficient remaining sense to seek the explanation I wanted by reading the document given me, rather than by clamouring for a spoken interpretation of those signs of calamity by which I was beset.

I need scarcely say that at the time of which I write, I was but little familiar with official documents. I understood at once, however, that the paper which I held was a certificate of birth. A little farther consideration showed me that the birth in question must be that of an illegitimate child, for the surnames of the parents did not agree. With numb brain and sick heart, with thick whispers in my ears, and a palsy upon my tongue, I realized that these

surnames were both familiar to me, and one, dear. I steadied myself, held my head, and read the document through to the last bitter word. The infant had been born at the beginning of the month of March just concluded, at a place called Farsdale in Yorkshire, it had received the name *Robert*. How shall I disclose its shameful parentage? It was the child—according to the certificate's testimony—of Robert Tyndal and Mary Murgatroyd.

Undoubtedly had any masculine mind ruled in our London lodgings, this painful evidence of evil would not—at the present time at least—have been suffered to meet my eye, and thus I should to a great extent have been spared the annoyance of recounting my connection with an immoral and unpleasing incident. But my mother's impulse on this occasion betrayed her into an error of judgment. She was, as the reader has already learned, fully able to practise secrecy towards me when her heart persuaded her that secrecy would be for my good; but entire openness was perhaps more natural to her, and now that the very centre of my happiness was assailed, her instinct inclined her to acquaint me at once with the kind and extent of the attack. Esther, it was manifest, felt uneasy at the course adopted; but her counsels, which would assuredly have favoured reticence on my mother's part, or at least a delay of the revelation for purposes of inquiry, had not yet, it is probable, had time to shape, still less to express themselves. Thus the impulse of my mother's first panic was obeyed; and the certificate was placed in my hands.

I read it again and again without a word. My stony

silence soon alarmed my mother. "Oh, Esther!" she cried out, suddenly; "have I done wisely in showing this to my poor Lucy?"

"You've a-done for the best 'M; an' no wrong, no fear. We mus' think quiet a bit, all on us."

"How did this come?" I presently asked, in a voice so hoarse that I scarcely knew it as my own.

"The morning post brought it," answered my mother, handing me the envelope in which the certificate had been enclosed.

I examined the envelope closely. No postmark save that of *London* was imprinted upon it: thus, it practically afforded no clue to the personality of the sender.

I asked again:—

"Was there no other enclosure?"

The reply was a negative. I saw that no good could result from further questions; and I put none. I went to my room; threw myself on the bed; and hiding my face, began to think the matter out.

What was the true signification of the certificate with respect to myself? It meant that at about the time when Robert Tyndal had first made love to me at Beremouth, in a manner apparently honest and manly, he had been involved in the perpetration of a cruel and dastardly wrong. It meant that the hero of my worship, the lover inexpressibly loved—and but recently (with infinite joy), acknowledged as my lord and master—was not, and never had been, the man in whom I had believed. It meant that my King Arthur was a libertine; my gold, dross; my soul's ænomel, a draught of poison. It meant, farther,

that this idol of clay must be cast down ; that this cedar of Lebanon—love—which had thrown its clinging fibres through my deepest heart, its goodly shadow upon all my grateful life, must be uprooted and destroyed.

I see the voluptuary smile at my reasoning and conclusion. I hear him say contemptuously : “ The girl, then, had not shaken off her straitlaced Puritanism, although she believed so. Still, too, was she wrapt in her old dense ignorance of men as they really exist : what son of Adam did she imagine faultless with respect to women ? Without the wit to take for what he was worth the good-natured though doubtless fallible man who had conceived a fancy for her, she harps upon his one slip, and on account of it renounces him for ever ! She must needs throw overboard a valuable cargo, for the sake of saving the crazy vessel of a transcendental morality ! With a grain of sense she would have left the leaky craft to take care of itself, and stowing herself and her treasures—*i.e.*, her lover and his love—into the life-boat, would have escaped, with everything worth keeping ! ”

This grain of sense, I frankly own, O Epicure, I did not possess. I required a love whole and honest—or I would have none : I demanded what I gave, and would accept no less. If, moreover, to shrink from impurity and cruel selfishness be “ straitlaced Puritanism,” may I remain a straitlaced Puritan to life’s last moment !—and if, O worldly sensualist, to hold that there are indeed some stainless men, betoken as you allege “ dense ignorance ” of the race, may I at least never extend my knowledge through you—who only know the Bad !

And now did my distracted mind strive to grasp the notion that the certificate might be a forgery, and its testimony false. But alas! how many were the items of probability composing the cruel account against my happiness! What a dire array of spectral memories uprose in my brain to frighten hope to death! Mary Murgatroyd had been the *protégée* of Robert's sisters; her singular beauty must often have declared itself in bygone days to his susceptible sight. How likely that in some warm, unguarded moment he had praised her loveliness, flattered her vanity, and paved the way to his final baseness and her ruin! How strongly did the girl's extraordinary behaviour, when after the alarm of fire at the lecture Mr. Tyndal had been specially attentive to me, corroborate the supposition that he had then already worked upon her feelings! Probable indeed it was that those sudden tears, those flaming cheeks, had announced mere jealousy of myself; too probable that the tenderer affection of which such jealousy is the complement, had been but reciprocal to an unholy passion whose disgraceful results were now made known. But a short time since I should have rejected with indignant incredulity the notion that so audacious a feeling as fondness for Mr. Tyndal could have existed in the girl's heart; still more decidedly should I have repudiated the suggestion that it might have been invited or fostered. It was now becoming increasingly difficult for me to do either. And foremost in confirmation of the certificate's odious testimony stood the facts that the story of the document both offered an explanation of the hitherto inexplicable dislike which Mary had shown

towards me—supposing her indeed at an early period to have surmised Robert's liking for myself—and frightfully fulfilled the vague threats with which she had left my father's house. Scarcely less conclusive in its verifying power now appeared the circumstance that Mr. Tyndal, having jocularly spoken to me of a woman whose affection for him exceeded my own, had afterwards been unable to explain his meaning—evading a manifest dilemma by indefinite deferment of the subject.

And this last recollection plunged me into a mental condition—the like of which I shall ever reckon as the most acutely painful that can befall human nature—of burning anger against my dearest idol. Such wrath I felt as works “like madness in the brain.” That he,—the man on whom I had thenceforward learned to waste my unhappy heart—fresh, it might be, from the unhallowed companionship of a plebeian paramour, should have presumed to approach me at Beremouth with the vows of knightly love upon his lips; that he should have laid claim to my faith, while practising elsewhere a heinous falseness; that he should have compelled me by his years, his reputation, his frank manner and open speech, to believe in a sound and sterling nature which in truth did not exist:—this was baseness, these were wrongs, that my whole being resented with a vehemence of ire which, while it lasted, sunk me into the lowest hell. It was his dearness, it was the vitality of my love for him, that made the agony of my rage so great.

In the midst of this passion of exasperation, a resolve which shaped my subsequent conduct to an important

extent, was half insensibly to myself arrived at in my mind. I determined that neither sooner nor later, neither by letter nor in words, would I enter with Mr. Tyndal upon the offensive subject now, as it seemed, destined to make me miserable for life; unless by some vast miracle—beyond the range of my present conceptions—it should first be demonstrated that the whole charge against him was false. I would pursue towards him—until that miracle should occur—one simple and undeviating course of silence.

Let the reader imagine the bitterness of a day spent on such mental work as I have above endeavoured to describe. Let him heighten the colouring of his conceptions by a realization of my shame; my perplexity; my comparisons of what might have been, with what now must be; my grief for poor Esther, who had innocently caused my wretchedness by furthering my engagement; my pity for my mother, to whom that engagement had been a renewal of hope and happiness.

Before long Esther came to rouse and to press food upon me. I was in no humour to offer resistance to her appeals: I tried to swallow the nourishment she brought, though it clung to my tongue and scraped my throat as dust and ashes would have done: I even sat up, went downstairs, and darned stockings.

There followed several hours of the same outward conformity with daily custom. For my mother's sake I struggled hard to continue calm: I succeeded; and the success seemed to bless me. That mamma was suffering acutely I could not fail to see: I knew, too, that to her

shame, and anger, and disappointment, was added the pain of a grave doubt as to whether she had done wisely in showing me the certificate. I should have tried to remove this doubt; but I durst not trust myself to speak to her on any but indifferent topics.

Meanwhile my feelings and convictions underwent the most sudden and violent changes. Now I had a fit of tenderness; now again indignation turned my heart to flint: now I clearly saw a path of probabilities leading to my lover's exculpation; now to believe his innocence possible seemed childishness and idiotcy. A single recollection at length served to give preponderance to gentler emotions, and to encourage my more favourable persuasion. I recalled and considered the existence of Mary Murgatroyd's clownish sweetheart, and the fact (which I could not doubt) that he had been employed by her to express and enforce her threats. It was clear that George Body could have had no connection with the story set forth in the certificate. Was it likely that Mary, having first threatened me with vengeance by the hand of her rustic lover, would afterwards have accomplished her revenge by means of that lover's discomfiture? I thought not. But it did not seem improbable that the strange passionate girl might have devised a chastisement of lies, as a substitute for the first-intended punishment which her sweetheart Body had proved, perchance, too manly, or too timid, or otherwise unable, to inflict. Thus I came back to the notion that the paper which had been sent us was no true extract from a register, but a falsity and a forgery: thus did I at last arrive at an earnest desire to investigate for

myself the history of the hateful document. I wanted to know whether the signature it bore represented the name of a veritable registrar; if so, I wanted to see such registrar, and to learn from his lips, as well as if possible by ocular proof, whether the writing was a fabrication, or whether it was indeed the copy, falsified or authentic, of any existing register.

Almost before I knew what I was doing, I had put on my bonnet and cloak, and was ready to go out. I had heard that somewhere in London was an office wherein were preserved records of all births occurring in England: I determined to find this place; for there, I doubted not, I should be able to obtain some of the information I required. I said a few explanatory words to my mother as to my intention; and reluctant to thwart me in present circumstances, she allowed me to go on my errand, only insisting that Esther should accompany me. I went out attended by the old woman, who walked behind me silently. I proceeded directly to the offices of Mr. Thain's agents in Gray's Inn Square, where I readily learned the location of the Government Department which I wanted to find.

When I came to the place my courage failed me for a time. The swinging doors, ever on the move as business men passed in and out, seemed to present to an uninitiated girl like myself an impassable barrier. I shrank away from the entrance; and found myself pacing a spacious, silent quadrangle, whose most conspicuous occupants were the numerous pigeons that with quick pink feet and nodding heads, paraded the paved enclosure in search

of chance food. I well remember the impression produced upon my mind by the architecture surrounding me as I walked. I owned that it was handsome, massy, dignified; but so exact was the correspondence between this side and that; so surely had each minute variety of outline its counterpart over the way, that as I passed along one pavement followed by my wordless nurse, I felt myself an intrusion and an offence, and wanted to supply the opposite flags with a second miserable Lucy Fitzadam, and a second Esther, pale, tall, and taciturn. I will not pretend to say whether Sir William Chambers or myself was answerable for these singular sensations.

It was not long before I grew weary of my cowardly diversion; I retraced my steps, and entered the office. I was received with courtesy: and it yielded me no small relief to find that the room into which I was ushered contained other females besides myself and my attendant.

The afternoon was by this time considerably advanced, and the official day being, I presume, near its close, the clerks were much engaged. I waited my turn amongst many other applicants for information.

During the interval which thus elapsed before I could put my questions to the officials, my thoughts were withdrawn from my own distresses, and rivetted on the affairs of others. In the first place a poor and aged countryman attracted my attention. I learned that he had walked to London from his rural home—a distance of fifty miles—in the hope of hearing of a loved grandchild, these two years missing, who had been the light of his eyes, the fondling of his heart, the last remnant of his race. He had just found

the record of the lad's death at sea. He came slowly sadly past me. I noted his feeble gait, his bowed head, his falling tears. I touched his arm, and whispered: "The Merciful God comfort you—I am in sorrow too." I cried myself as I spoke; he blessed me, and went on. As he passed between the double doors of the room, a superlatively dressed young man, who had been standing near me, and to whom I had taken a strong dislike on account of his coxcombry, overtook and pressed money upon the aged traveller. Fearful that his gift might be refused (it was generous, I know: more coins than one were given, and I heard the chink of gold) the youth did but wait to mutter the words:—"for God's sake do not attempt to walk back," and then came towards me again. I saw that his eyes, which were of a somewhat washed-out tint, and not so truthful as might have been wished, were full and glistening. The dandy's compassion moved me even more than the old man's grief.

My thoughts were now further diverted by a revelation of a different kind. A female voice, raised to a high unnatural pitch, caught my ear. Looking at the speaker, I saw a woman of tall figure and commanding mien, and of bold though not uncomely face, addressing herself to one of the clerks. "By heaven, then," she said, bringing down an Amazon fist upon the counter as she spoke; "by heaven then, I am free! She is indeed his wife. God bless her! Joy to both of 'em! but freedom for me. The wretch! that he should have taken me in like this, and led me the life of a dog ever since! But I'll be even with him; I'll punish him; he shall get the worst the law can give

And I'm free, I'm free! Let me have six copies of the entry. Fees did you say? Here's my purse; take every sixpence in it, if you will." I was frightened and disgusted by this display of unhallowed exultation—by this coarse publication of a shameful family scandal. As the virago presently swept past me, bearing away the evidence of her own freedom, and of her quasi-husband's bigamy, I turned chill and sick with the notion that perhaps such jealous anger as my own belonged by right to that unholy world wherein such histories as hers are born.

But another painful tale was at this moment unfolded. A bright and unaffected boy, with handsome features and engaging manner, who had been searching for the record of his birth, having now found it, applied for a certificate. He was pleased and talkative. I heard him describe to a bystander that he was just about to obtain a good situation, for which reason the evidence of his age was needed. The person whom he addressed was sympathetic, and drew him out. He said that his parents had died in his infancy; that a kind friend, unrelated to him by blood, had brought up and provided for him. In the midst of his narration, he was desired to read over the document he waited for, which was now ready. As he did so, I saw his roses die; I heard him begin an exclamatory question, which his modest lips refused to finish. He slunk out of the room, poor fellow, a pallid effigy of his former self—trembling, tearful, crushed. A softly-whispered word was echoed about as he left—the word *illegitimate*.

This room, I thought, is a hall of justice, where judgment is pronounced on the children for their fathers' sins;

where tangled threads of crime are disengaged, and deeds of darkness brought to light. It is a temple where infallible oracles are invoked, and inevitable fates declared. It is a vault where joy and peace are buried; a Purgatory for the sensitive, but a Paradise for the un pitying and rude.

A clerk stood before me inquiring how he could serve me. I handed him the certificate which the morning's post had brought, and asked whether the name at its foot was indeed that of a government registrar. In a few moments he replied in the affirmative. I gasped; my heart stood still: one hope had fled. I next inquired whether the handwriting upon the certificate could be identified as that of the man whose performance it purported to be. Upon this a large volume was brought me, in which appeared several entries bearing the same signature as the paper in my possession. I carefully compared and re-compared the different writings. I hoped, feared, doubted, hoped again. It was *possible* that the penmanship upon the paper was but a clever imitation; it was like, it was not like, that of the other records; I thought, however, that the official who was assisting my investigations seemed satisfied of its genuineness.

The book to which I had been referred, was made up, as I now discovered, of the *copies* of original entries of births. Where, I asked, were the originals themselves to be seen? I was told that they were deposited in local offices throughout the country; but it was added that the registrar who had made (if indeed he *had* made) the entry now in question, would, in present circumstances, be the right person to apply to for a sight of the original,

since his current register-book would not be filled for some time, and would remain in his hands until complete. I now begged and obtained, the full address of this officer, in whose custody was to be found—if it existed at all—the conclusive testimony to Robert Tyndal's falseness, and my misery.

I should have liked to ask other questions; but I saw that my eagerness was attracting attention, and I feared lest I should reveal my connection with the story of the certificate. Thanking the clerk for his attention, I rose, and remarked as I bade good afternoon,—

“You must, in the fulfilment of your duties here, listen to many strange and distressing histories, and discover many startling truths?”

“You are right, madam,” answered the clerk. “If much that comes under our notice is ordinary, authorized, and prosaic, we hear enough besides to supply all the novelists with plots, to drive all the moralists to despair, and to shame poetry in its wildest flights.”

I blushed and went. I had gained little; no confidence certainly—only *an address*.

CHAPTER VI.

A WILD ENTERPRISE.

How will the world repute me
 For undertaking so unstaïd a journey ?
Two Gentlemen of Verona.

WALKING home that day, notwithstanding that my mind was crushed and disintegrated by the shock of the morning's news, I yet contrived to form methodical plans for communicating with the Yorkshire registrar—setting to work according to instinct and habit to try and repair my injury, although with the cloudiest prospects of success. A poor trodden beetle, shapeless and ruined, will make a show of running to doubtful shelter, beating in his retreat something like his accustomed little pattern in the dust; perhaps my pitiable efforts after escape from despair might not unjustly be likened to his mechanical and futile flight!

Esther's silence continued nearly to the steps of our lodgings. There was dignity—I had almost added consolation—in it. It was the silence of Patience still vital, though deprived of the sustenance of Hope; of Faith sublimely sensible that her proper element is darkness; of Good Sense resolved to run no risk of making bad worse. It was golden indeed; the mute ring of it caught my

soul's ear, and taught me anew of Esther's moral wealth and power.

As we walked on, I could not help noticing that the old woman watched me narrowly. Did she see anything unusual in my face? A scheme—a wild one—was forming within my brain; did it betray itself in my countenance? The watching went on till our house came in view: then Esther broke silence, and said,—

“Lucy, you do look so self-willed as you didn't ought to look. What be 'e a thinkin' of now? You've been an' ketched a new feesh a-comin' along; an' you be goin' to cook of 'en yer own way. Take care as a don't pison of 'e!”

I evaded Esther's question; for it would have upset my projects to give an answer: I coloured too; for my nurse had detected the existence of devices which I had intended to remain secret. She understood my physiognomy more justly than I estimated my powers of concealment. The facts were these:—At first, my simple intention had been to write to the registrar. I had mentally composed the letter; and an elaborate fabric of subtle queries it had been; but ere long I had disowned my creation, and abandoned the scheme. Writing, I had discovered, would never fully satisfy me. Hence I had come to entertain the notion of a solitary and secret journey to Yorkshire; that I might learn definitely whether the grievous document on which my troubles were built had indeed an authentic foundation; that, if it had, I might examine the original record with my own eyes, and talk face to face with the man who had made it. Here was the novel

project which I had devised ; here was the source of that determined look upon which Esther had commented.

We went indoors : henceforth I used great pains to hinder my plans from declaring their existence in the expression of my face ; and only when alone would I trust myself to bring to maturity the project which it was impossible for me to complete without contrivance. I was probably in no mood rightly to estimate the difficulties which must necessarily attend the execution of my scheme ; but I saw some obstacles in the way. I was dimly aware, I believe, that it would be awkward for a young girl like myself to make a long journey alone to a strange place ; that the subject of my intended inquiries was one unsuited to occupy my mind, and employ my lips ; that in leaving home at this time I should necessarily be banishing myself from my only reliable comfort—the presence of sympathy and affection. But these considerations did not seriously weigh with me. If I saw nothing better in my plan, I saw in it an excuse for the postponement of misery ; and this was enough to outbalance every argument that could be adduced against it.

My heart and conscience alike opposed my resolution—not continuously, or I hope they would have carried an amendment ; but amidst the noisy tumult of my distress, they sometimes made their protest heard. This protest modified, if it did not alter my intentions. It became a first consideration with me to spare the dear ones whom I was about to leave, all needless anxiety on my account : in other words my determination lost its first selfishness, and became blent with better emotions. I

planned that my mother and Esther should be prepared to find me gone by a written announcement which should reach them before any other evidence of my departure : I settled that during my absence their solicitude should be moderated by daily letters of a hopeful tone, and of information as explicit as possible. At the best, however, I fear that my higher nature had but little voice in the arrangement of the proceedings which I am now about to describe. Esther had probably struck the key-note of my present state, when she had spoken of "self-will." Perhaps there was some relationship between the perverse and scheming silence of to-day, and that odd infantile obstinacy, under the influence of which I had formerly refused to say U.P.—up.

Be this as it may, I held my course with all the old persistency. I resolved that my journey to the north should take place the next day, and that it should begin at an early hour of the morning. I had by me a few pounds—the remains of a private store that in the days of our prosperity had been replenished continually by indulgent gifts from both my parents ; and this sum I believed I might, with care, make sufficient for the execution of my plan. It was not excessive for the purpose ; but I had lately learned the art of contending successfully with pecuniary deficits.

The consciousness that a definite course of action lay before me, yielded me a certain relief. The sense that in questioning the testimony of the certificate, and in conducting myself accordingly, I was showing faith in Mr. Tyndal, itself increased that faith. The reaction in

favour of confidence in my love's honour and fidelity, which had succeeded my first angry acceptance of the accusation brought against him, now set in more fully than ever; and my present convictions displayed themselves with greater violence than the preceding. No longer able to observe silence on the subject of the certificate, I ran to my mother and half-blamed her for having given even passing credence to such an imposture. I spurned the libellous paper in her presence; defied its seeming authenticity; assured her that its testimony must speedily be disproved, its lie confessed, my lover cleared, and his perjured calumniator punished.

My varying moods were met by my mother with an equable and tender acquiescence. Whatever the preponderating emotion of the moment, she carefully went through the process of thought producing it; and wherever my excitement led me, there I found her quietly walking too. The refinement of her self-forgetfulness had never been more touchingly displayed to me than in my present grief. She now taught me to see that the very transmission of the certificate to us, favoured the notion that the document *might* have been fabricated for the express purposes of inflicting pain, and of gratifying pique: she reminded me how openly Robert's sisters had expressed their fears concerning Mary Murgatroyd; and asked whether they could have done so, had their brother been even remotely associated with such fears? My mother's reasoning had its weak points—and I perceived them: but I had no wish to dwell upon these flaws, and I did not do so. While cheered by her suggestions, I

was deeply moved by her sympathy, which, so long as I felt its power and completeness, seemed to shame the plans that I was concocting without her knowledge.

During the evening I was much alone. The intervening hours of thought had not permanently affected my purpose : I now began to prepare for carrying it out. I found a railway map, and decided to what station it would be needful for me to travel. I packed a valise with the articles which were necessary for my journey ; and (with a pricking conscience and an aching throat), concealed it. I further discovered that a train suited to my requirements would, at an early hour in the morning, leave a terminus which was not far distant from our house : by this train I determined if possible to depart.

These arrangements made, I sat down and wrote. Carefully avoiding the appearance of haste in my composition and penmanship, I produced the following letter, which I designed to leave for my mother's perusal when I should go away.

“ MY DEAREST MOTHER,—

“ THE heaviest blow I have ever felt, has fallen upon me to-day ; and your tenderness and sympathy have been—as they always will be—proportioned to my need of them. I beg you to regard the step I have now resolved upon, and which I shall have taken before you read this, with the indulgence which naturally belongs to your compassion for my distress.

“ As I have told you, I see reason for believing—or at least hoping—that the written evidence which has made us

so wretched is false. I cannot rest without investigating the matter for myself; and this, I am leaving you, to do. When you read what I am writing, my dearest mother, I shall be far from you: I write it to beg you not to be anxious about me; and to assure you calmly and honestly that you will have no need to be so. I shall be away, perhaps, for some days; and you shall hear from me each morning—except, perhaps, the first after my departure. Forgive me if I seem unkind in acting so independently: trust me, and do not be unhappy. I have plenty of money, and everything I want.

“Take care of Robert’s letters when they come. I cannot write to him at present: you will know best whether or not you should do so. You also will be the best judge what course to pursue if his sisters call: how thankful I am that they have not been to day! Good-bye, darling.

“Your loving child,

“LUCY.”

I folded and enclosed the sheet, and set it carefully aside. I then went downstairs to my mother. She was writing: I thought I knew to whom; but the silent fit was on me again, and I could not ask her if my surmise was correct. My heart now began once more seriously to mis-give me with regard to my contemplated journey, in its probable bearing upon these dear loving ones at home. Would it not infallibly cause deeper anxiety to them, than it was likely to win relief for me? I could not help seeing that it must. For a few minutes my purpose

wavered. Then the old agony of suspense returned ; and my plan found its final confirmation.

I fell asleep soon that night ; and Heaven gave me many hours of dreamless repose. My mother's slumbers too, were sound, as I discovered when I opened my eyes. This I did betimes in the morning ; finding, as I always have found, that sleep could not prevail against the will to wake at a certain time. I was glad that my mother still lay unconscious : I desired if possible to leave her side, and to pass out of the room, without disturbing her.

It is characteristic of my temperament that I am incapable of strong feeling during the early hours of morning. The prospect of life as viewed on first awakening, has ever worn to me a dull neutral hue—like the landscape under a clouded dawn : it has wanted alike the golden rays of joy and hope, and the profound shades of despair. The state of my mind on the morning in question afforded no exception to this rule. When I awoke and arose, I was not, for the time, plunged into the deeps of despondency ; still less was I elated by unreasonable expectations : I was simply, soberly wretched. Like the heathen sages in the first circle of hell, I was in a condition, not of suffering, but of mere unhappiness.

This dull frame was not conducive to the spirited execution of a questionable plan. But the impetus of yesterday's desire had not left me : in spite of present inertness it drove me forward to the fulfilment of my design. I dressed quietly and quickly ; placed the letter I had written overnight on my mother's pillow ; briefly begged Heaven to protect her, to bless me, to pardon me

if I was doing wrong, and bring good out of my expedition; then slipped from the room—and from the house. I had fully expected the dog Smut to embarrass my movements, for he was allowed to be at large in our dwelling while its inmates were asleep: but he suffered me to pass out without giving an alarm. Perhaps he remembered the chastisement I had once administered to him, and dreaded a repetition of it. I swallowed a few mouthfuls of food at the railway-terminus; and probably before anyone stirred at the lodgings, I was hastening northwards through villages and fields.

I was glad to be thus on the move amidst unfamiliar scenes: there was some diversion for my thoughts in the objects that lay along the line of my journey; and the sense of progress towards my destination was itself a relief. But the country—the dear country which during my long separation from it I had learned well nigh to worship, no longer appeared so precious, so mysterious, so divine, as it had appeared in bygone visions. The change was in me. I had tasted of other than those serene joys with which external Nature fills the soul: I had drunk the exciting cup of human passion. I felt for the first time that “there had passed away a glory from the earth.”

The flat but luxuriant pastures of the midland shires were left behind; the farms of southern Yorkshire, with their well-built stacks and trim hedges, stretched themselves around me: and now, after change of carriage and some delay, I turned aside through the busy hives of the West Riding. Here, the wild surprises of the scenery, no less than the tokens of human energy and enterprise

which accompanied them, were to me new and startling. The black moorland heights, the deep ravines, the rushing waters, were, to my untravelled perceptions, equally wondrous with the countless columns of steam, the vast troops of comely shawled figures, the innumerable clogs clattering on the stone causeways, and the huge Argus-eyed factories. Man, in his most audacious and determined mood, here seemed to have encountered Nature in her most obstructive, and to have subdued her to his will as effectually as Petruchio tamed his Shrew. Amidst the now deepening gloom of my own mind, I watched these natural features, these signs of dominant human industry, with something, I think, of such weak wonder as that with which confirmed sickness must regard the changeful whims and eager aims of perfect health and vigour.

Afternoon was far advanced, when I perceived the landscape expand, and found the recent hum and movement of mighty populations exchanged for the silence and stillness of uninhabited wilds. Soon afterwards I was deposited at the station of a small grey town, which stands on the threshold of that impressive district comprising the great northern dales. I had decided to leave the train at this point, believing that the railroad would take me no nearer to my destination: my guesses and measurements, however, had been erroneous; and I soon found reason to regret these miscalculations.

I passed out of the station, and with my valise in my hand walked boldly to the entrance of a small inn near. For the first time I became alarmed at my unprotected situation, at the distance lying between me and my home,

and at the unconcern of those about me for my safety and happiness. I was the more discomposed when, on stating that I required a conveyance to take me to Farsdale, I was told not only that the place was twice as distant as I had supposed, but that I should certainly be unable to find suitable accommodation there for the night. It may have been that the landlord of the inn wished to keep me where I was: certainly he seemed disposed in every way to discourage me from proceeding to Farsdale. He spoke of the lateness of the hour, the badness of the roads, the wretchedness of the public-house which was the only refuge for strangers in the secluded dale-village that I wished to reach.

After some discussion and consideration, I so far allowed myself to be swayed by the landlord's representations as to adopt a compromise. A town which lay a few miles from Farsdale, accessible, as it appeared, by a tolerably easy road, might, I extracted from the obstructive host, be gained in reasonable time. This place I knew as giving its name to the registration-district in which Farsdale was comprised. I determined to go to the town in question, and no farther, that night.

And now my ignorance and inexperience began to tell against me. I was asked what sort of a vehicle I should like. Having a misgiving as to the sufficiency of my funds, and a notion—I know not to this day whether it be erroneous or not—that two wheels must needs be less expensive than four, I replied that I thought a gig would answer my purpose. While the conveyance was being prepared, I took a slight and hasty meal. In the next

room to that in which I regaled myself was a young student of the pianoforte, playing *Pestal* in skeleton harmonies, at a great rate, and with a violence that suggested a misapprehension of the title, and an association thereof with the additional word *mortar*; while in the passage outside, a profoundly melancholy parrot, on which I had spent much pity in passing, was apparently striving to pluck from his memory a rooted sorrow by ridiculing the cat, drawing corks, and neighing to the horses in the yard. Such were my external aids to digestion.

The gig came to the door: I paid what I owed and went out. I was painfully apprehensive; of what, I scarcely knew. But I put on my best show of bravery; and if my disquietude was not fully concealed, the fault did not lie in my efforts to conceal it.

A glance at the person who was about to drive me, increased, while it concentrated, my fears. This was a jockey-like youth of about seventeen, with the tightly-clad and ill-proportioned legs that belong to his objectionable confraternity; with a sly face and winking eye; above all with a pair of knowing red ears, set forward in the manner described by Paley as characteristic of those animals which pursue their prey. It would be difficult for me to express the intensity of the dislike and alarm with which the feature last mentioned inspired me.

The first act of this youth in my presence was one whereby he obviously designed to undermine and destroy my courage. Employing some of those subtle arts by which persons versed in equine character can, it would seem, silently influence a horse as they please, he secretly

incited the animal attached to my chariot to lay back his ears threateningly, and to throw his whole body into a posture of protest and obstinacy such as I have never seen elsewhere before or since—except in delineations of Balaam's ass. These dreadful manifestations answered the end for which they had been produced, and frightened me thoroughly; but reflecting how great would be my gain in moral influence over my driver, if I could contrive to appear superior to the usual timidities of my sex, I promptly mounted the gig, without disclosing the terror that reigned in my bosom.

I found the elevation of my seat a new source of fear; so also was the perspective of the horse's back; so again was the telegraphy carried on between steed and driver. There seemed to be volumes of frightful meaning in the twinkling of the animal's ears; and the frequent utterance by the lad of such phrases as "Hold up old mare," or "What are y' a'ter, Monkey?" when to all appearance the beast was progressing steadily, further suggested how delicate and yet how distinct must be the dangerous communications so responded to.

But the alarms arising from my lack of familiarity with two-wheeled vehicles, were soon merged in anxieties of another sort—those engendered by symptoms of tenderness towards me on the part of my driver. Before we were far on the road, he began his blandishments by removing an extra rug from his own knees to mine, with the words:—

"Ah doubt ye'll be cold, mah deeär; tak' an' coover yersel' oop."

I felt that this kind of thing must be nipped in the

bud. Resolutely returning the wrap, and sitting bolt upright, I said :—

“No, I thank you : I want nothing but to get quickly to my journey’s end.”

“Lor’ !” replied my companion, “if Ah ivver see sik a lass ! Ye be so keen as t’ wind itsel’, an’ yet so bonny as a rose too. Look at them heyes ! the’ do shine like diments !”

Whether to cry, or laugh, or throw myself into the road, I scarcely knew. I did neither. I cleared my throat in a menacing, indignant manner, looked straight ahead, and turned very cold. Nothing daunted, my driver resumed :—

“If we’d a-metten mah sweetheart, Polly, a-coomin along, wouldn’t she a’ been jealous, by mah truly !”

“She would have had no need to be so, whatever, Mr. Driver,” I replied, altering my tactics. I saw that wrath would not deliver me from my dilemma, and that to provoke the resentment of my companion might increase my difficulties. To conciliate, and at the same time to repress, seemed to be my true wisdom. How fortunate if I could manage to draw the enemy into some lengthy narration—say of his professional experiences ! To tell such a tale would at once gratify his self-love, and check his personalities. I laboured much and long to gain the end I proposed to myself : and at last reaped the reward of my determination and perseverance. A satisfying reward it was !

The story upon which my companion was finally induced to embarked, related to a certain generous

traveller in the drapery trade, whom on one occasion it had been his privilege to drive by the very route we were now following. This exemplary gentleman, it appeared, had treated the narrator to "a glass" at every public-house of any note or respectability on the road,—beginning with "T' Sow and Pigs," and ending with "T' Old Angel," the titles of which establishments reminded me of the Flesh and the Devil. Some of the inns mentioned, must, I cannot help thinking, have been—as to their names, at least—fictitious: for instance, "*T' King's Legs*," which was spoken of together with the King's "Head," and "Arms." My coachman went on to explain that the delightful warmth produced by these frequent potations had been such, that although the season had been midwinter, and the weather frosty, he had "smoked like a chimley" throughout the ride; nor had his head been uncomfortably affected by the draughts: a slight sensation as though the road were continually "bearing to t' left" had constituted his single abnormal feeling. To these edifying details I listened patiently, thankful that they occupied time—which represented progress. Presently, however, it became clear that I was intended to act upon the teaching of the tale; my driver drew rein before a small public-house, and declared that he must "water the horse"—in other words, refresh himself with liquor.

I felt that the moment had come for firmness and promptitude. I announced plainly that I would not consent to "treat" on the road, but added that the drink-money bestowed at the close of the journey should, if that journey

were finished in good time, be especially handsome in amount. My driver resumed his forsaken seat—not in the best of humours. To mollify his rugged mood, I affected further interest in the commercial traveller, and asked for additional information respecting him. The remainder of the history was tragic and brief. One day, when the gent was rather “the better” for his cups, and was driving his own “trap,” his horse had suddenly bolted off with him to destruction; guided by the scattered fragments of pasteboard boxes, and by a train of hooks-and-eyes half-a-mile long, agonized friends had followed him to a certain “four leän ends,” where, amidst the wreck of his conveyance, they had descried his mangled and defunct remains.

After the tale was ended, my anxiety took a new turn:—my driver repeatedly fell asleep. As dusk was now deepening into dark, and as the roads were bad, this somnolency seemed dangerous. I soon saw, however, that the horse was reliable, if the coachman was not: the steady progress of the animal reconciled me to the wavering semi-consciousness of the lad: who, leaning backwards, preserved himself from falling by mechanically clinging to the reins, and whose frame described a series of threatening curves from left to right and back again.

The scene around me now was wild and melancholy beyond description. We had risen to a vast height: on every side were wide wastes of moorland; and in the distance I could see huge shapes of hill—the like of which I had never looked upon before—their morose outlines growing dimmer, their fantastic forms gathering mystery

and awe, with the deepening of the sky. A keen and cruel east wind blew. Nature wore a guise that I neither loved nor understood: she was not only drear, austere, repellent; she was uncanny, cabalistic, terrible. I even fancied that the stars themselves were possessed by a dire sorcery: when my eye viewed them, they seemed but that moment to have regained their places after the execution of some mad dance. Now that my drowsy driver left me to perfect silence, once more I began to think: and my thoughts, which of themselves would have been sufficiently miserable, were rendered additionally so by my gloomy and forbidding surroundings.

But at last we again began to descend. The mighty hills loomed nearer, loftier, darker. We sank into the centre of a shadowy dale: crossed a noisy beck; then entered the sinuous street of a still and dimly-lighted town.

My comrade aroused himself—or else the clatter of his horse's hoofs, echoed between walls, aroused him. Steed and driver were evidently agreed as to the proper halting-place:—the gig came to a stand at the sign of the “Black Boar.” I thought this title low, and augured unfavourably from it of the decency of the house: I was told, however, that the “Black Boar” was undoubtedly the head inn of the place. In proof of his statement to this effect, my driver pointed to a notice over the door:—“*A hearse and mourning coaches to let.*” The announcement was not so convincing to my mind, as burdensome to my spirits; but the lad evidently believed that in calling my attention to it, he had done all that could be required to prove the

respectability of the establishment. With a sort of supererogatory air however he waved his hand towards the hearse itself, which he perceived standing near, as if gratuitously to furnish me with additional evidence that the sphere into which he was introducing me was elevated. No doubt this last proof should have allayed my misgivings completely ; for in the lamp and star-light I could see that the hearse was one of great magnificence. So splendid indeed were its plumes, that now,—I suppose after a day's exhibition in public—they were being carefully tied up in newspaper, no doubt to preserve their imposing dignity for future display.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE WILDERNESS.

For here forlorn and lost I tread
 With fainting steps and slow ;
 Where wilds immeasurably spread
 Seem lengthening as I go.—GOLDSMITH.

THE landlady of the “Black Boar” received me with no marked favour. The circumstances of my arrival at her house were undignified; my limited luggage suggested slender resources: doubtless the consideration of these things to some extent determined the character of her welcome.

I paid my driver—a sum far larger than he deserved; and dismissed him with thankfulness, as indeed I should have done on almost any terms. I was then shown into a chamber which from the nature of some of its fittings I perceived with dismay to be the commercial room of the establishment. A half-tipsy man who was coming out as I entered, and whose words tumbled from his lips less most of their vowels, inquired how I found trade. When he saw that I gave no answer, he intimated, confidentially, that he perfectly understood my silence, and that his own experiences of the unparalleled stagnation of business were

to the full as bitter as mine. I protested against being located in this room, whose air was sick with odours of whisky and smoke. I said that I should remain at the house for two or three days, and should require an apartment to myself: but I was told in reply that no other room could be prepared for me till morning. I bore my fate; determining that if any one else came in, I would immediately retire to bed.

It was necessary for me to take food. I did so. Afterwards I began a letter to my mother. As I was thus engaged, my privacy was disturbed, not by the inebriated traveller who had met me on my entrance, but by a tall, bronzed countryman, of a somewhat wild and haggard appearance. As he apologized for intruding upon me, I caught the familiar west-country brogue, which in his speech was broad and marked. I answered that I was just leaving the room, and begged that he would not go away on my account. Upon this he seated himself; and I took my departure.

I went to my bedroom, longing, yet scarcely daring to hope, for some genuine rest. The chamber was small and low, yet not cosy; chilly, but wanting in ventilation: its floor was uneven, its draperies were dingy, its paint was soiled. The mantel-piece was depressingly adorned with several barrel-shaped pots, formerly dedicated to "superior anchovy paste;" a dusty velvet pin-cushion satirically decorated the dressing-table. The carpet was loose; and its detached strips showed a perplexing propensity to follow me about the room. This cheerless interior was rendered all the more cheerless by the character of the night out-

side. The bitter easterly wind before-mentioned had gathered force, and now struck rudely at the lattice: sometimes it flung before it a pelting shower of sleet; while, amidst its bewildering blasts, the "Black Boar," which hung close against the window, was driven to utter the most unnerving groans and shrieks.

Under these conditions my slumbers were slight and broken. I shall presently have occasion to mention certain impressive dreams, which subsequently visited me in the very room which I have been describing; but I must own that on the night in question my sleeping fancies were particularly frivolous and confused.

My interrupted dozings and foolish dreams ceased at an early hour of the morning. I rose and dressed myself before any one else in the house began to move. I intended to proceed to Farsdale on foot, and was anxious not to delay the hour of starting: but the people of the inn were apparently little disposed to hurry themselves in the preparation of my sitting-room and breakfast. Meanwhile my patience was severely tried, and I suffered much from the cold, which was excessive for the time of year. The long confinement in my bedroom, however, brought about one salutary result: it lengthened my usual morning devotions. I was too sad to-day to give thanks, too sad even to proffer any request; but I humbled myself before the Mightiest with unfeigned self-abasement; and He, who is also the Most Merciful, did not repel my efforts to approach Him. There was a whisper in my ear as I knelt and wept:—" *Shall we receive good at the hands of the Lord, and shall we not also receive evil?*" "Yes," my soul

replied ; “ it is reasonable, it is right, that He should give us both as He sees best. I will submit ; I will endure ; I will believe.”

The draughts of tea which constituted all the breakfast I could take, warmed, refreshed me, and nerved me for my walk. I started with a hurried step—eager to be at my destination ; yet sometimes when I realized the purpose of my journey, when I reflected that I was proceeding to the conviction or acquittal of him whom I loved best, I felt as though advance was impossible, and stood irresolute upon the uneven stone causeway—half minded to retrace my steps.

Having passed out of the town I began to obtain just notions of the wild and romantic scenery amongst which my misery had brought me. Northwards—to my left—rose the giant fells whose shapes I had dimly traced the night before. So rotund were some of their forms, they looked like vast hemispheres inflated from beneath. The dints and creases of their massy slopes were traced in drifted snow ; and dun clouds flying before the fierce wind, hid at intervals their grim summits in films of dreary mist. As I proceeded—half-blinded by the deadening blast, which ever and anon brought with it a rigid fall of small and frozen snow, that smote like knotted whip-cord—the scene grew wilder still. The ground to my right rose high and higher ; the road rose too, and at length emerging from the enclosures of hedge and wall, it wound out upon the open moors. I found myself following—at an elevation high, but not the highest—the course of an enormous dale, whose mighty proportions reduced me

to a pigmy—a speck—an atom ; whose huge loneliness and desolation inspired me with a nameless dread.

Never indeed while I live, shall I forget that walk—that scenery. The bolder aspects of Nature were then new to me. I had never, at that time, seen any of the stateliest shapes under which she may be viewed—not those, even, to be found in our own island. Neither the craggy crater of Snowdon, nor Ben Lomond's mirrored heights, nor the expansive undulations of Skiddaw and Saddleback, had ever met my eye. The present less mighty but still majestic view impressed me the more on this account. But the gloom of my mind invested the prospect with an additional grandeur—it imparted to it a deep solemnity and awe. The swart heather which draped the fell-side, wore to my sight a profound and funereal blackness. The splashing gills, coursing down their fretted channels to join the impetuous beck far, far below, seemed vocal with dread warnings ; and the unsightly patches of snow which lay about like the shreds on a seamstress' floor, set me thinking of shrouds and of the dead. My sense of solitude was overwhelming. Not Pyrrha herself, gazing from the " cloven crest " of Parnassus—the sole surviving woman—upon a wasted world, could have been much more desolate than I, as I trod these eminences, and viewed this weird wilderness view. She possessed at least a husband still : alas ! did I possess one ? And my husband was all my kind to me.

Of the few human beings whom I met on the road, I carefully asked my way, although, as I afterwards found, my possibilities of error were not many. It was difficult to

make the dalesfolk understand the place I wished to reach, for they were unused to a clear pronounciation of the word Farsdale. This pronounciation I was therefore compelled to modify, and the farther I travelled from the town, the more extensive was the modification required. The name first became *Farsdle*; then *Farssle*; at last I was brought to the humiliation of inquiring for *Fussle*.

It was a weary tramp. The wind blew fiercely without abatement; at intervals the hail-like snow continued to smite; it was hard to believe that April's first week was out; that the violet, primrose, and anemone had long been abloom in the sheltered nooks of Somersetshire. The scene about me repeated itself as I advanced: it was monotonous in its bleak, abhorrent vastness. The valley below yielded an unvarying map-like view of fields enclosed by low grey walls; of dreary stone-built barns; of the foamy beck—borrowing from distance the appearance of repose. Above me was an illimitable wild; steeped in inky shadow, and peopled by dusky mountain sheep. Among the last mentioned, however, were new-born lambs, snow-white, with jetty knees and noses: the lovely little creatures (strangely unlike their dingy dams) cast a gleam of brightness through the surrounding gloom, as a sweet baby in a troubled house will do.

At length I saw before me the scattered cots and whitewashed kirk of a lonely village, which I knew must be Farsdale—or rather Farsdale-town; the dale I had followed was itself *Farsdale*. Faint and storm-beaten as I was, I quickened my pace; I longed now that my suspense might be ended at whatever cost. At the first dwelling I

reached, I inquired for the house of Matthew Metcalfe—such being the name of the registrar to whom my distressing business led me. I could learn nothing of the man. The busily-knitting dame who answered my question said curtly that she had “nivver heeärd tell o’ sik a chap.” I went further and inquired again—with a similar result. This was strange: I could not understand it. But presently it occurred to me to alter the form of my question; and I now asked for the registrar of births and deaths. “Why, Lor’ bless me,” said the woman to whom I had last applied, “ye do meän Matthey o’ George’s t’ regeester; see, yon’s his missis.” The speaker pointed to the figure of an old woman retreating into a distant cottage. I returned thanks for the information, and went to the house indicated, upon the door of which I saw, to my relief, the more civilized title of the officer whose familiar appellation was so different.

I was much agitated now; and in trying to tell to the old woman the object of my visit, I found that I had nearly lost the power of utterance. I contrived, however, to make known my wish, and was informed that the registrar, although from home at present, was expected to return “every minute.” Such information often means that the absent person will not be back for an exceedingly long while. I made up my mind to wait for an exceedingly long while; and I did not equip myself with a stouter patience than I needed.

My hostess was a gentle, white-haired creature. While perfectly courteous to me, she seemed unconscious of any difference of rank between us; and made no curtsies,

used no obsequious phrases in addressing me, such as the Westford poor had accustomed me to expect from their order. Without relaxing the rapid action of her fingers, as she busily knitted the Guernsey frock upon which she was engaged, she said,—

“Coom farrard an’ sit ye down by t’ fire. Happen ye’ve coom ivver so far to see t’ Maister?”

I answered that I *had* come a long way; and gladly sat down to rest and warm myself.

I was now greatly struck by the spotless cleanliness and tidy arrangement of the cottage, which, in spite of its penurious fittings and furniture, was exquisite in its wholesome purity, and a model of neatness and order. Presently my attention was attracted to a small iron box, placed carefully upon a black oak chest, and flanked by rows of official-looking reports and other volumes. Observing what had caught my eye, the old woman remarked in a hushed tone, and with a gesture expressive of simple and profound reverence,—

“Yon’s where he keeps t’ regeester-books!”

Her manner, full of tender veneration for her husband and his occupation, interested me at once. Miserable though I felt, I drew her into conversation; and I was glad afterwards to have done so: hers was a pure and kindly soul, and intercourse with it afforded refreshment and excited benevolence. She told me of the long journeys on foot which her aged husband was compelled to take to register births, and of the trifling pay by which these laborious travels were remunerated. But the old man, she added, did not grumble; although he sometimes

thought it rather hard that he, wandering far and wide to make his entries, should receive for making them no more than the registrars of populous towns, who sate at their own firesides to register, filling in their fifty records, and gaining their fifty fees, to his one. It seemed to me that reason and justice favoured this modest and seldom-spoken complaint. Afterwards the old woman went on to tell me of her children. Her cheek glowed, her eye brightened, as she expatiated on their goodness and talents, their success in life, their distance from home.

By these and other narrations, the long interval that elapsed before the registrar returned was somewhat shortened. But not until the ancient clock in the corner had told two hours past noon did the clicking latch of the cottage door inform me that my suspense was almost ended. It was well that the old woman's hospitality had regaled me with a sustaining draught of milk, and with several fragrant morsels of toasted oat-cake, before the registrar's appearance; for my breakfast had not been of a kind to support me effectually under the excitement which his coming occasioned me. As it was, I began to turn cold, and to grow dizzy, when I saw him standing on the threshold.

The old man was bent with age, and wearied with his walk in the bitter wind and driving snow. I saw that his hands trembled as he laid down the register-books, which he had been carrying with him: and I wondered how many—or how few—fees his toilsome tramp had secured. In a voice which I scarcely knew as mine, I told him that I wanted to search his book of births; and asking the name of the child respecting whom my inquiry was made,

he proceeded to attend to my request before taking any refreshment or even seating himself.

I gave him the fee which was his due for the search; but as he opened the birth-register under my eyes, I laid my hand upon his arm,—

“One minute, my good man!” I said. “My happiness for life turns upon what I find—or do not find—on these pages. Wait a few seconds: let me prepare myself for the worst!”

He paused. An astonished but compassionate look overspread the faces of the old couple. I covered my eyes with my hands.

“Merciful God!” I inwardly prayed, “didst not Thou authorize, command, nay, institute, the love of woman to man? Then enable me, loving under Thine approval, to bear the miseries of my love. If he is not what I thought him, forgive him his sin; and support the unhappy creature who must henceforth live without him!”

I roused myself; I motioned to the registrar to turn the leaves of the volume before me. He did so; and the search was brief indeed: my quickened sight immediately discovered the entry which I had hoped not to see; a further momentary glance showed me that the document which had been sent to my mother was in every particular an accurate copy of the original. The old registrar, observing the point at which my eye had been arrested, laid his finger on the signature—too readily recognized by me—of the mother, Mary Murgatroyd; and exclaimed, sadly,—“Ah, poor lass! poor lass! She knaws cruelty—an’ sorra! an’ a bonny lass too!”

But for the care of the good-wife I should probably have succumbed to bodily exhaustion before. Now, my feelings were too powerful for my frame: the moment of physical surrender was come. The page swam before my eyes; a confused throng of drowsy sounds crowded my ears; I chilled, sickened, and forgot.

When consciousness began to return to me, my eyes were wandering over the low ceiling of the cottage, and my intelligence was trying to comprehend a wooden frame suspended therefrom, on the strained strings of which, sheets of brown oat-cake were hanging. Where was I? What had happened last?

A glimpse of the old registrar's face answered these questions—recalled to me my situation, and my misery. The taste of spirit was on my lips; a glass containing it was now again offered me; I swallowed some of the liquid, and felt able to sit up. Gentler kindness than I now received was never bestowed on suffering human creature. No vulgar curiosity as to the cause of my swoon was exhibited; no word was spoken which might have added to my distress. Whatever was said, was in the way of tender comment on my youth, or my "bonny" face (which was stated to be the "varra pictur' of our Bess's"), or my apparent friendlessness. As I gradually revived, the obligations under which I lay to the kindly owners of the cottage, became increasingly clear.

And now I asked to see the entry in the register-book again, and examined it word by word, letter by letter. I inquired whether the registrar recollected the circumstances in which he had recorded the birth. He replied that he did; and on my invitation he described them. The mother of the child, he said, had come, during the preceding February, to lodge at the house of a woman living three miles from Farsdale-town. At the beginning of March the infant had been born; and within a fortnight of the birth, the mother had sent a message to him, asking him to call and effect the registration. The woman had received him in her room with bitter sighs and tears; had signed the entry while upon her bed; and had asked for a copy of the record so soon as it was made. Not long afterwards she had left the place; entrusting the baby to the occupier of the house in which it had been born, and leaving money for its support. She had spoken often of her lover's treachery.

A week since, the old man added, the child had died: no extraordinary fate, he assured me, for infants so born—and so tended. It was not the custom, I learned, for these little illegitimates to survive their infancy. They were not treated, perhaps, with manifest cruelty; not exactly starved; not positively strangled or smothered; not directly disposed of by poison: they owed their release, on the contrary, to the milder and more chronic, but equally efficacious influences of neglect, and of Mrs. Meddlefuss's celebrated *Quieting Quintessence*—that unfailing remedy for both maternal and infantile inconveniences. To such causes, probably, might be attributed the speedy exit of Mary

Murgatroyd's child from the piteous pageants of this sub-lunary drama. It was not for me to wish that its part in life's tragedy had been prolonged. I envied rather than regretted its obligations to neglect and Mrs. Meddlefuss.

It was enough. What business had I to doubt, or to trouble the registrar longer? If any questionings still went forward in my mind, I silenced them as idle and absurd. I rose to go away.

The old people were deeply concerned at my having to walk back to the town. The "Maister" even declared his intention—kind, gallant creature!—of coming with me. But I would not have given his weary old feet an extra step on any account; and I firmly declined his protection. It was no easy matter, however, to allay the solitudes of these warm hearts; and many were the shapes which their offers of succour took. Dan o' John's o' Hawes's gill had a light cart and a smartish pony; t' Maister would step along and borrow them directly for my use if I would wait while another half-hour. Or, Nanny o' William's had a bonny little room empty wi' a bonny little bed in; m' appen I would take advice and wait while to morn—I was nobbut a weakish bairn to go back that long road ta-neeght. At least I must drink a drap more whisky, and eat a mouthful o' victuals along wi' t' maister afore steeärtin'. But with many heartfelt thanks—and with not a few tears—I refused these thoughtful proposals. My feelings overflowed as I bade the dear old pair good-bye; and I kissed the good-wife's cheek, and wrung her aged partner's hand. They stood together at the door watching me till I passed out of sight: I waved them a blessing as I turned the

corner that at last came between us. May God give value to the blessing!

Alone once more with my sorrow—a sorrow now justified, confirmed, complete, I felt that the bitterest hour I had yet known was come. Is it not strange that amidst this, my blackest darkness, a calm enlightening ray of confidence and hope should have arisen within me? So it was. “He that is low” at least “need fear no fall:” in my sad humiliation I knew that I could count upon such negative blessedness as this. But my relief was fuller, more positive: it was relief from Him who casteth down—that He may lift up; who humbles indeed—but only to signalize a coming exaltation.

My heart had been touched by the simple kindness of the old registrar and his wife. A marvellous and blessed train of reflection was the result. Can He from whom their tenderness was derived be less tender than they? Will not rather His love transcend their’s as He transcends them? Thought expanded amidst the contemplation of boundless benevolence: memories of individual distress were swallowed up in the consciousness of an all-containing compassion. I perceived with a clearness of spontaneous conviction which made me wonder at my previous blindness, the absolute and infinitely beneficent control exercised by the Eternal over the sad complications of mortal existence. I saw the sons of men working into a million tortuous shapes their various wills; led now by passion, now by interest, now mayhap by principle: I saw the Infinite, lofty and mysterious in the serenity of perfect goodness and unerring skill, evolving from the unceasing

conflict and disorder, designs glorious and eternal. I learned the dignity and beauty of faith—and I believed : I discovered true cause for hope—and I hoped : I looked upon Love—and I loved. It was a rapture, a vision : it can never be forgotten. I had often striven to rise to Heaven : at my lowest, Heaven had now come down to me.

When, in course of time, my personal experiences began again to win back thought from its wider occupation, I found that a new light had fallen upon my history. That history—like others—was the workmanship of Omnipotent Goodness : not a passion or a pang involved in it but was subject to His direction, and would subserve His benign purpose. Under the influence of these persuasions I slowly and carefully reviewed my life. I considered the vicissitudes of its outward circumstances ; the changes—no less marked—of my inward feelings. I could not but own that the “history” had been “strange” and “eventful”—much of it dark and mysterious. But I believed in an elucidation to come. The conviction rested with me that all my occult experiences, and amongst them my present sorrow, were but the fragments of a plan, the whole of which I should one day understand, and the wisdom of which I should wonderingly acknowledge. I determined that my attitude meanwhile should be one of calm patience, of submissive awe, and of reverent expectation.

It doubtless occurs to the reader that there was nothing new either in my theological discoveries or my mental posture. A thousand times, he says, have graceful curates

insisted upon the need for such discoveries, in the trite phraseology of the fashionable Evangelical pulpit: a thousand times have Methodist Local Preachers vehemently enforced such a disposition, with the aid of threadbare imagery and conventional gesticulations. But then fact newly learnt is new fact to the learner; and a right frame reached by an individual for the first time, possesses for that individual much of the interest of never having been reached before by anyone. Heaven forbid too that truth should lose its sweet freshness, or trust its calm, because lips false or fanatical may have talked the one vapid, and the other wild!

During my walk to Farsdale my surroundings had appeared repellent and terrible; now they seemed only grand:—I felt interested rather than dismayed. When I reached the town and the “Black Boar,” the preternatural elevation of thought and feeling which I have endeavoured to represent did not forsake me. After a while I noticed in the little sitting-room that had been allotted to me an old-fashioned pianoforte. It was used as a sideboard: and, covered by a dark cloth, it looked, I thought,—long, narrow, many-legged as it was—not unlike a walking funeral. I opened it, however, nothing disheartened by the similarity, and found that it was an instrument of Clementi’s make, that its tones, though wiry were true, and not without an honest richness of their own. I played long, and with delight:—“snatches of old tunes” first;—a minuet of Handel, neat, square, sweet, like a well-kept rectangular bed of scented flowers—an air from *Artaxerxes*, full of the simple faith and joy of childhood—an ancient

melody of Scotland, sad and dying with disappointed love, but quick with the confidence of conscious truth. Then I left the creations of others, and created for myself. I grew excited. Many were the wild discords which I flung in amongst the harmonies. Extempore players, one and all, will support me in the declaration that I know not whether heart, or brain, or fingers, must be held accountable for these feats. At length, in a climax of inspiration, I produced a weird and prolonged succession of chords in which the harmony was held suspended from beginning to end—a new discord being propounded before the last was resolved, throughout. I had just lighted upon the final solution, when the door of my room opened and the landlady appeared.

“A person wishes to see you, miss,” she said.

I reflected—wondered.

“To see me?” I asked.

“To see Miss Fitzadam, he says.”

I had not been aware that anyone near me knew my name; but I remembered now that it was inscribed upon some articles which I had brought with me. I requested that the “person” might be admitted; and into the room stalked that bronzed countryman whom I had momentarily encountered on the previous evening.

He closed the door behind him: he folded his arms: he looked at me fixedly and long. At last he said, gruffly:—

“*The Onknown.*”

A few moments’ silence followed: I stroked my brow to extract from it a latent memory. Then I answered fearlessly:—

“Not so entirely unknown as you suppose. Your name is *George Body*.”

At the very time when I was most absolutely unprotected, I found myself confronted by the secret threatener whose menaces, reaching me formerly amidst perfect security, had then caused me the deepest alarm !

At the very time when Mary Murgatroyd was most prominently before my mind as the successful ensnarer of my own dear lover, here was her original champion and representative, apparently as ready to do battle on her behalf, as he had shown himself to be in penning the letter of my pristine terrors !

CHAPTER VIII.

AN ANCIENT FOE DISCLOSED IN A NEW QUARTER.

Agamemnon. Les temps sont changés, aussi bien que les lieux.—

Iphigénie.

WHAT might I now expect to follow? Should I see a pistol levelled at my head, a blade lifted to stab me to the heart? Or, almost worse, should I be compelled to listen to words of coarse and brutal insult?

I did not know; yet I felt but little fear. My recent meditations had not been of a kind to yield immediately to thoughts of craven terror; they had bequeathed to me, I found, bravery enough for my present requirements. For once my mind was as composed as I believe my outward appearance to have been.

The intruder looked surprised at my knowledge of his name, but he did not speak. I therefore went on:—

“I connect you at present, Mr. Body, with nothing more creditable than a cowardly threatening letter of which I hope you long ago learned to be ashamed. What do you want with me now?”

No immediate reply. Mr. Body leaned against the door behind him, crossed his legs, rounded his blue eyes;

and having watched me fixedly for some little time, said :—

“ Young ooman, I be that cheänged, as zo I was a piece o’ turmuts wi’ the zmothervly on.”

“ Quite possible,” I thought, “ but how does the announcement explain this visit ? ” I awaited farther revelations.

Another pause, however, ensued. At last Mr. Body lifted his finger and voice together, and inquired—with the air of having lighted upon an illustration by means of which he might confidently reckon on making himself understood :—

“ Did ’e ever now, young ooman, zee a steer down in the *Quaarter-evil* ? ”

“ Never, Mr. Body,” I answered, shortly.

“ Humph : you never did, didn’t ’e,” rejoined Mr. Body, slowly, with a baffled manner that changed unpleasantly to one of indignation as he added :—

“ This here’s what ’tis then : I be come to let ’e know zummat o’ the mishtif as you done when you turned off the poor gell Mary jest vor nothin’.”

I began to have an inkling of the truth. Mr. Body had learned of his sweetheart’s unfaithfulness to him ; was trying to find her out ; and meeting with me casually, was pleased to set down to my account the discomfort which she had caused him. The supposed original offender in the matter of the girl’s discharge, was to be held responsible for the last unhappy turn in the tide of her affairs. I should have felt a good deal of anger at this discovery, but for the reflection that the man before me was probably suffering much as I was myself, and that he therefore had

some claim upon my sympathy, notwithstanding his culpably wrong notions. I answered firmly, but with as little irritation as fear :—

“ Let us understand one another, Mr. Body. If you come here to justify and repeat the unmanly threats of your letter, I candidly tell you I will call assistance, and get rid of you ; but if on the other hand you have anything reasonable and respectful to say, I promise you my attention.”

I could not help thinking, as I spoke the former part of the above sentence, how scanty were my means of summoning the aid which I had declared myself ready in certain circumstances to invoke. The door was impassable—for Mr. Body stood against it. The bell was about equidistant from him and me, and my chances of gaining it first would have been extremely small. To knock on the floor would have been a useless signal of distress, for beneath my chamber was a large and unoccupied club-room. Thus, the window would have afforded the only instrument of communication with the outer world which I could have hoped to use effectually ; and even this—for the due transmission of screams—must have been opened ; and I reflected that it was at least doubtful whether Mr. Body would have allowed me to open it for any such purpose.

“ Never *you* vear, young ooman,” said the man with a tinge of amusement in his manner, as though he surmised my reflections and found them rather entertaining, “ I be come on a right err’nt, an’ not on a wrong.”

“ So much the better, Mr. Body,” I answered with a

kindling temper. "But recollect, there was nothing in your letter to lead me to expect right treatment at your hands."

"I'm not a-goin' to answer vor what I done zo var back as the writin' o' that ther' letter," said Mr. Body, making his eyes rounder than ever. "Be I the zeäm chap now, as I were then? Not I; no more beänt you, young ooman, neither."

This was a summary way of shaking off the responsibilities of the past. But I must confess that the words so nearly corresponded with certain self-excusing thoughts which from time to time had floated across my own brain, that I could not judge them severely. Who does not feel disposed to disown the self and performances of bygone days? Only look, reader, at the letter you wrote a few months since, which you then thought such a triumph of the epistolary art, and you will say inwardly as you read it:—"Thank God the emotional creature who penned these lines has now completely ceased to be. Yes; the sober and dignified *I* of to-day—whose handwriting, by the way, is so vast an improvement upon the laboured characters here displayed—has neither part nor lot in this mistaken effusion."

"Leaving your former threats out of the question then, Mr. Body," I resumed, "your present intrusion has scarcely tended to give me confidence in you. And now let me tell you plainly that the 'mischief' you charge upon me, is a mischief for which I am unaccountable. The share I had in sending Mary from my father's house was indirect and unintentional: I even begged for her pardon. If she told you otherwise she told you a falsehood."

“Look’e, young ooman,” spoke the man with a great deal more vehemence than I liked, while a slow but heavy wave of crimson anger rose and flooded all his head;—“there’s a devil ’ithin me about that ther’ gell; an’ I caan’t answer vor ’n neither if you do rouse of ’n up; zo mind what you do zay, that’s aal.”

“I have no wish to hurt your feelings,” I replied, “but it is certain that by some means or other you have entirely misjudged my conduct towards Mary. I trust you will own, now you know the truth—after all, that matter of the letter must be cleared up first—that you acted very wrongly in writing to me as you did.”

“Miss,” answered Mr. Body, manifestly softening towards me, “I won’t zay as I never had no doubts whe’r ’twere a tidy thing to do to write to a young oom—a young miss, that ther’ way; and in course ’twere much moore ontidy-like if the young oom—I do meän the young miss, was noways desarkin’. But ther’, I done it vor the weak aggen the strong—bein’ that stupid an’ zavage too at the time as a bumbledoor inside the winder. Poor gell, how she prayed vor ’t! She were near beside herself. An’ Lord! I were pretty fond of she, *I* were; if she’d a-asked vor the mooän, I’d a’most ’a’ took a barra an’ speäde, an’ gone up a’ter it.”

Here was a significant acknowledgment. Mary Murgatroyd had employed almost violent means in order to instigate her lover to the inditement of the threatening letter. It followed that his act was more easily pardonable than I had supposed. It was under the stress of the girl’s passionate pressure, that he had been driven to do the

wrong; considering the circumstances, that wrong had been less than I had hitherto reckoned it to be.

I could not fail to trace in Mr. Body's last words some indications of an apologetic spirit: these indications I felt it right (as well as politic) immediately to acknowledge; and while I was engaged upon the acknowledgment, it occurred to me that I might turn the present situation to useful account, by eliciting from Mr. Body such information respecting Mary Murgatroyd as he might be able and willing to impart. Would not her late history of necessity be the history of another person also? My heart beat heavily and fast as I found myself drawn into inquiries concerning her.

"After your explanation, Mr. Body," I began, "I can make some excuses for your error. I assure you I am not one to take offence, when there is no longer any wish to give it. Now, will it surprise you if I say that I understand, much more fully than you suppose, the nature of that "mischief" which you just now laid to my charge, and the results of which upon yourself you so vividly described under the figures of a blighted turnip-field, and a diseased steer? I do understand it. I know that Mary has disappointed your hopes, has been cruel and unfaithful to you——"

"Hold ma'am," said the countryman, (let the reader observe that I had now received a second titular promotion; I was no longer "miss," still less was I "young ooman") "'twarn't her doins; I'll never believe as 'twere. She were took in, an' toled off; as sure as I be a born man she were."

The words pierced my heart like a sword. "God

knows," I answered. "But now, Mr. Body," I added after a pause, "if your opinion of me has so far altered that you can trust my friendliness towards you, tell me where Mary Murgatroyd is at the present time, and what brings you here."

I could not avoid the conviction, at this point, that there was honesty and even kindness in Mr. Body's eyes—true they had an odd look, as if all his thoughts started up before his mind as so many separate surprises, and as if his intelligence were pursuing these various wonders to a solution at great disadvantage, though with praiseworthy diligence. Nevertheless, the eyes were certainly honest and kindly. The rest of Mr. Body's features were not prepossessing. His nose was an ungainly spike, much too red and much too polished for beauty; his upper lip was inordinately long; his chin receded unsymmetrically. But unquestionably the round blue eyes went far to redeem their surroundings from utter ugliness or insignificance. They beamed with a somewhat embarrassing benevolence as their owner now proceeded to say :—

"Ma'am, I do zee plain as there's no harm in you to'ards I, for all I went aggen you sharp in that ther' letter. An' if you've no objections, I wouldn't mind a-sheäkin' of 'e by the hand : not 'ithout wishin' as I'd a-took peäns to zee whe'r the poor gell was a leädin' of me right or no, afore I done shut a thing as to threaten anybody—which the more zo a'ter vindin' out as she were mistook. I beünt zo sharp as zome on 'em at ketchin' hold o' the rights o' things at vust; but when I *does* get hold I never lets goo noo moore."

The first half of this final sentence being undoubtedly true, I thought there was good reason for believing that the latter part might be true also. Being inspired, therefore, with a friendly feeling, I readily extended my hand, which was slowly swung to and fro for so considerable a period of time, that I began to fear hands were included amongst those "rights o' things" which when once seized by Mr. Body, never again escaped his grasp. I was glad to make friends with the "Unknown," who had formerly caused me so much dread of the window-curtains, the cupboards, and the dusk; but Mr. Body's hand felt exceedingly uncomfortable, and I could not help regretting the custom which has made hand-shaking a sign of reconciliation.

When the ceremony was over my visitor resumed:—

"You was a-asking of me, ma'am, what brought me up here; an' well you *mid* ask; a pleâce wher' none o' the volks caant taalk like chrisht'ans; a girt beàre pleâce as 'tis too, wi' winter a-ztickin' to 't at this here time! An' I'll be boun' as the guckoo don't zing here afore June, if a do then. Why, 'twas the poor gell as brought me. 'Twere she, an' she only. I come'd to look a'ter she."

"And have you found her?" I asked.

"I've a-larned *wher'* to vind her, anyhow; an' I be goin' ther' pretty quick."

"If you have no objection," I said, "tell me when and how this sorrow of your's began; how long Mary had been engaged to you. Tell me, in short, as much of her story from the time when she left our house, as you feel yourself justified in telling. I—I—am interested in it."

Mr. Body began with the somewhat exaggerated candour of a newly reconciled enemy :—

“ Well, then, ma’am, this here’s how ’twere—not wishin’ to hide away nothin’ wher’ no thieves is about—she an’ I was never downright pledged to each other till jest a’ter she leäved yer vaather’s. I’d a-knowd her ’most everzince she’d a-been wi’e: but zomehow or ’nother she hadn’t a-made up her mind afore: she’d a-put me off an’ off. But when she were in trouble, she know’d wher’ to come to vor love an’ pertection! You mus’ know as I kips on the ole varm at hooäm wi’ my mother; an’ zoo the mother took Polly in. Well, the gell promised to marry I afore long.”

Here the voice was silent. I saw the countenance darken; and I felt the blood fly from my own lips and cheeks.

“ But, ma’am,” resumed the speaker, with a rapid and husky utterance, “ ’twarn’t to be. A cuss of a veller—the Lord A’mighty blast him! come a-hangin’ about our pleâce. The wolf ’ad a-zmelt the lamb: and a prowled roun’ the vold till he’d a ketched of her. I never zet eyes on he—an’ a took good keäre as I should’n, I’ll warr’nt; but I’ll be boun’ as a zaw I, one time or ’nother. ’Twere in June as a took her off. We missed her one night—zearched an’ watched vor her here, ther’, an’ everywher’; but—Lord help me!—she were gone! ’Twere long afore I heärd a breath about her. Then volks told o’ the ‘gent’ as they’d a-zeed wi’ her down Beechanger. An’ I picked it up at last as she’d a-met the cussed veller at a ztaïtion a vew mile up the line to Lunnon.

“ Ma’am, I’ve a-had no peäce, nor no rest neither, ever

zince. I've a-done no work; an' the varm 'u'd be goin' to the pigs, 'ithout th' ole ooman did keäp things a bit tidy. Even them cattle insurance volks up in Lunnon 'ave avoun' out as I beänt up to business, an' 'ave turned me off vrom *their* bit of a job. When August come, I were pretty near gone mad. I went to Lunnon, an' walked the ztreets an' parks vor weeks, a-hopin' as I mid zee the poor gell, an' tell her as I forgave her, an' get of her to come back. But I never ketched zight o' her. Then I went back hooäme, an' tried to bear myself a bit; an' such bearin' as 'twere I *did* bear till last week, when I rummaged out an ole letter as told wher' her mother lived—as I'd never know'd afore. I come along north then, an' zeed her mother; she beänt zo var from here. Then I learned as a chile were born, an' as the poor gell 'ad a-wrote hooäme to tell of it, from the pleäce yonder wher' she'd a-come to hide. Eesterday I come along to this here town, an' went over to th' house wher' the poor gell had a-been; but she were gone. Then I goes to th' ole chap as registers, to zee the register; an' then back aggen to wher' the chile were born. Th' ooman ther' wern't one o' the right zoort to zpeäk honest; but by payin' vor't I got her to put me on the right track. The cussed veller as led Polly astray have a-leäved her now—maybe he's took on wi' another gell afore this!—an' she's voun' out zome pleäce o' sarvice or 'nother wher' she's gone to, vor a livin'. I've a-got the neäme o' the pleäce seäfe; but Lor', now I be close upon her, do zim a'most terr'ble to think o' zeein' of her."

At this moment the clouds on the countryman's face seemed to gather depth and blackness. I could not restrain

a shudder : my heart beat so loud that I fancied Mr. Body must hear it.

“ There’s dree things moore,” he added between his teeth, “ as I’ve a-larned by comin’ up this here way : I’ve a-larned the blasted neänie an’ the blasted treäde o’ the chap as has done all the harm—vor I zeed ’em in the register ; an’ I’ve a-larned what his cussed ugly veäce is like—vor Polly leäved behind her a pictur’ over yonder, as the ooman vound ; an’ a’ter Polly’d a-been gone two days she wrote back to zay as the pictur’ were to be took keäre of partiklar—*vor twere the pictur’ o’ the child’s vaather*. The little thing were a-livin’ then ; an’ the poor gell know’d the valley of the proof. Zoo I says to th’ ooman—havin’ a-happened to vind out what she’d a-got—‘ I mus’ have that ther’ thing of a pictur’ ’—an’ by a bit more payin’, I got it ; *an’ I’ve a-got it here*. An’ zoo ’t do aal come to this here : I knows the veller’s neäme, an’ the veller’s business, an’ the veller’s veäce ; an’ mark me——”

He paused ; clenched his fist ; ground his teeth. I felt myself turn sick with a new terror as he concluded :—

“ Wher’ever a be, I’ll find of ’n out one day : an’ I’ll make ’n pay vor what he’ve a-done to the last varden ! This here hand o’ mine shall do the job. I’ll smaïsh in that ther’ ugly veäce, till it’ll make the gells zick to zee’t ; I’ll spile his bad wicked eyes, as the’ shaan’t look no more mishtif in a hurry ! an’ I’ll crush his imperant nose, an’ stop his saucy mouth vor ever ! I’ll dash every bit o’ strength out o’n : an’ if ever I leäves ’n alive, he shall go about a-sheäkin’ an’ a-queäkin’ like a weg-wanton, an’ a-limpin’ like a drashed houn’ aal his born days !”

I had listened as silent, motionless, and cold as stone: the dread awakened by the words had for a time paralyzed me. Nor did my terror spring from the words only. The speaker's face had gathered an intense malignity which declared his vengeful purpose even more plainly than his uttered vow: it was a face merciless and murderous: reason was not in it—only deadly, devilish passion. All the varied currents of my late distress were henceforth drawn together into a single mighty stream. My mortification, shame, disappointment; my love, jealousy, and anger, were alike merged in one violent emotion—that of alarm for the personal safety of my unhappy lover. His sin, his cruelty to Mary, his insult to me, were forgotten: his danger alone was remembered. What could I do—I must do something—to avert from his guilty head the retribution which threatened him, to stay the tide of vengeance rising for his destruction? I looked with growing dismay upon the giant shape before me. I recollected indeed that Robert Tyndal was himself a large and powerful man; I believed him to be physically courageous; I doubted not that he would be able to defend himself against any common human enemy. But the huge countryman—as I now saw him—was well nigh super-human: his brawny, labour-tempered limbs, must, I thought, be nearly resistless under any conditions; and energized as they would be energized by this Satanic passion of revenge, it seemed to me that they could not be used upon any one without deadly damage.

My fear gave me words at last. I said with all earnestness:—

“Your wrong, Body, is great enough, Heaven knows. The sin which has injured you so deeply was deliberate, dastardly: I own to the full—and feel much more than you dream—the blackness of the crime committed, and the justice of your anger. But, my man, I charge you solemnly to restrain the madness of your revenge! Your face and your words terrify me—they show that your passion carries you out of your better self. This must not be. Turn your thoughts in a new direction. Remember that this degraded one, against whom you swear such merciless vengeance, is yet a fellow-creature—and a fellow-creature upon whom his Maker has not yet pronounced judgment. How can you or I dare to say that under the circumstances in which he was placed, we should not ourselves have fallen as he did? Are we so strong, so faultless, that we can presume to allot or inflict the punishment even of guilt like his?”

The man answered hastily:—

“An’ what o’ the poor gell then—deceived, an’ ruined, an’ vorsook;—taken away vrom aal as were decent, an’ happy, an’ good; an’ lef’ allooän a’ter aal to take keär of herself?”

I was far from taking the same view of Mary Murgatroyd’s part in the offensive history which had been recounted as that taken by her ardent sweetheart: but I saw that the reference to her at this time might be made to serve the purpose I had in view—that of turning this wronged indignant man from his design of revenge.

“What of Mary?” I said, coming near, and laying my hand on his arm, “Just this:—it is in reference to *her*

that I, your manhood, your conscience, and your God loudly call upon you to act. Show your vengeance indeed—but let it be shown, not on the person of your enemy, but in undoing the mischief he has done! Bring his wickedness to judgment by winning Mary back to virtue and happiness! With the firm will that you possess, and the blessing of God which you must seek, this end is possible now, and may become certain.”

He was not, it seemed, wholly unmoved by my reasoning: but the desire for personal retaliation is strong in wronged human nature. He shook his head.

“It’s aal right enough Miss, what you do zay. I’m not a-goin to queshtun that: but what’s a man to do as has a devil ’ithin him?”

“To call upon God to cast the devil out. And look here, Body—I will go further in my argument than I have yet gone—listen carefully to me I pray you. Nothing in this world happens by chance. Providence ordered that you and I should meet here this day; that you should express to me your dangerous and violent lust for revenge upon your enemy; and no less that you should hear my solemn protest against the wild and wicked desire. My protest reaches you at God’s permission: is it not a word from Him? You know it is! You dare not go away now and act as you might have done if I had not spoken it! You dare not cherish your longing for vengeance another instant! Away with it, away with it, in God’s name, for ever!”

“Bless me Miss!” said Mr. Body softly—a look of concern, almost compassion, quickly stealing over his face,

and strangely obliterating the savagery from it; “you be ill—I’ve been a’ terr’fied of ’e: you be a-goin’ to vaint!”

Now I came to think of it I did feel unwell—much as I had felt after reading the register a few hours before: but faintness, taken in time, will often yield to the will; and I was determined not to swoon in Mr. Body’s presence. I sat down resolved to recover, and said:—

“No, no; I shall not faint. But I am deeply in earnest in what I say; that is why you see me pale.”

My indisposition was perhaps more efficacious than my remonstrance had been: Mr. Body’s fury was, for the present at least, allayed. He apologized freely. No portion of his conduct to me seemed entirely to satisfy him, and indeed I think he had several reasons for being discontented with the whole of it: he also expressed his desire to take my advice; and in reply I urged him to delay his departure, to sleep upon my counsels, and to let me know in the morning if he were able to adopt them. Such were the immediate results of the meeting which, while it had brought about a singular reconciliation between myself and my formerly “unknown” enemy, had yet created in my mind, without his knowledge, a deeper dread of him than ever; a dread of him as the vindictive foe of Robert Tyndal.

Alone again, I found my former calm return. The new shape of my anxiety came to be looked at in the light which had illuminated its earlier shapes. I went to bed that night, sad indeed, I might almost say heart-broken; yet not without a whisper of peace and hope in my weary ear.

I have never been able to discover any general rule by which to calculate what portions of life's experience, will, at particular times, revisit us in dreams. During the night to which my tale now brings me, I fancied myself moving amidst scenes more than usually dissociated from those in which I had lately taken a part.

I thought that I lived again the happy life of childhood. My brother Frank seemed to be my constant companion. Now I was racing round the garden before him, in whip-cord harness—Margaret Thorne came, and went, and came again. Now we stood together over the water: the man of war was lop-sided and would not float. Now the tall boy had just arrived from school: I saw him standing in the dark doorway, on a gusty night: his voice was altered.

Then came again the dear holiday rambles. Now it was early morning, and the breeze was Autumn's. Above was a dappled sky, cool and far: the sun was rising. A river rushed near, full with Autumn rains: the woods were dying silently; drenched was the blue-green, matted, meadow-grass. Again:—We stood on a heath-clad promontory wrapped in a dense summer rain-mist. The air was salt: dim gulls were swinging through the soft steam: the purple and gold of heather and of furze walling in the sandy road were bleared and dull: there was no sound but the wash of waves below, to right and left. Yet again:—We entered a hushed and solemn wood. The umbers and purples of winter were about us: at our feet wound a streamlet—lately high and broad, for the twigs overhanging it were clogged with tangled straw

and leaves ; the grass beside it was laid and smeared in the direction of its flow. He spoke : the tone was strange and hollow. “ Lucy,” he said, “ we are alone now, quite alone. I will say to you a serious word. It is for you only. It may be hard to understand : yet remember it—‘ *Forgive!* ’ ” I looked at his face. It was no longer the face of his boyhood. It appeared as when I had last seen it—colourless, terrible. I thought the scene changed suddenly here : we were within walls ; his form was stretched upon the ground ; his hair dripped with wet ; the weeds were upon his clothes. I embraced him with cries and sobs—for I knew that he was dead.

Yet once more (so I dreamed) I saw his dear lips move. They moved, they uttered a whisper—faint, it was, as a distant echo, yet distinct and arresting as a word breathed into the ear through a speaking-trumpet :—“ *Forgive.* ”

The whisper woke me. I started up, and called aloud :—“ Frank ! Frank ! ”

There was no answer but the wailing wind from the fells ; and the groaning remonstrances of the “ Black Boar ” as he uselessly besought the wakeful breeze to let him sleep in peace.

CHAPTER IX.

A PLEDGE DEPOSITED IN MY HANDS PROVES
UNEXPECTEDLY VALUABLE.

Lear. The art of our necessities is strange
That can make vile things precious.

King Lear.

THE next day was Sunday. Of this I was reminded at an early hour by three sad and feeble old church bells, in whose weary voices there was something so human, that I found myself pitying them in my half-sleep, as though they had been indeed three aged people. They were more musical, with all their infirmity, than those lusty young cousins of theirs in town, of which mention has been made in a previous chapter. I welcomed the gentle melancholy sound. It told that *peace* was possible, even amidst distress and disappointment; and thus it almost shed peace upon my own distressed and disappointed heart.

To say that I thought no more of the vivid dreams which the night had brought me would be scarcely correct; but when I did think on them it was only to wonder at their irrelevancy, and to feel thankful for that irrelevancy as having afforded some—though a sad—relief from the tyranny of present sorrow.

I could not travel home to-day. I felt too weak and shaken for a journey; and to the task of facing home-life stripped of every joy which had lately beautified it, I found my courage as yet unequal. I wanted time for reflection: time, such as this day of rest might give, to complete my recent submission to God.

I went to church at the hour for service. Every feature of the dismal little interior is before me as I write these lines:—The chocolate-coloured gallery, decorated with the Royal Arms, and inscribed with a list of *Benefactions to the Poor of this Parish*; the monumental tablets on the walls, adorned in several cases with a kind of bat-like cherub, which I take to have been the conception and execution of some one local artist, and which resembled those naughty but simple-minded imps that seem, according to the testimony of old prints, to have haunted Christian in the Valley of the Shadow of Death; the unpainted pews; the yellow Dove, Triangle, and rays, pictured on the otherwise unpainted east-window; the worn stones of the aisle, and the bulging white-washed walls.

But in this unpromising little temple I found a sanctuary from despondency. Here the confidence of yesterday was revived; here the vows of yesterday were renewed. The clergyman was aged, his hair white, his voice tremulous. His years, his manner touched me; they imparted a peculiar force and pathos to those prayers, which amidst the most variable conditions of faith and feeling have rarely failed to give voice to my desires; to soothe my distress or solemnize my joy.

I did not soar so high, however, even on the wings of

this elevating service, as to surmount all petty anxieties. I was surprised, when I stood up for the *Te Deum*, to see close in front of me the gigantic form of Mr. George Body—surprised, because I had imagined that he must have left ere this—and he it was who caused me the uneasiness to which I refer; for greatly as I desired another conversation with him at a convenient time and place, that I might farther dissuade him from carrying out his revengeful intentions, I certainly dreaded the public greeting from him which I foresaw was likely to take place so soon as the service should be over. Mr. Body did not turn his eyes upon me for a long time; but meanwhile there was an expression about his shoulders which showed me that he knew of my nearness to him. My reading of this expression was justified on the commencement of the first hymn, when Mr. Body immediately turned round, and finding me without a hymnal, tortuously contrived to share with me the book that he had secured—an act of politeness which I am sure his spinal column and dorsal muscles resented. He blushed in executing this piece of courtesy, and so did I in receiving it. I have always felt more embarrassed than edified in looking over a stranger's hymn-book.

My fear was that after service Mr. Body would wish to walk back with me to the inn; and in order to avoid this companionship, I endeavoured to escape suddenly from the church. But the countryman, verifying my anticipations, performed his exit as rapidly as I, and accosting me in the churchyard, kept steadily by my side. The townsfolk evidently looked upon us with much interest, concluding, as it appeared, that we were destined

for each other. The discovery of the impression produced was not a little disturbing to my mind; and I know not what foolish and unchristian conduct towards my swain I might not have perpetrated in order to dispel the existing popular illusion concerning us, had I not quickly become possessed of an all-absorbing wish to recur to the important subject of the previous day's discussion, and to make the utmost of the present opportunity for adding to my entreaties that forbearance might be shown towards poor Robert Tyndal.

My arguments were for some time attentively and silently listened to. At length Mr. Body interrupted me.

"Ma'am," he said, "signs is signs, and tokens is tokens. Now, to go to a pleâce o' worship is a thing as I haven't a-done afore to-day, not zince the poor gell were off. An' I hope as you'll teäke the meänin'; as is, to voller on wi' your advice. There mid be devils 'ithin us, an' there is sich; but when advice is give us as is right we ought to voller on wi't all the zeäme."

"You mean to say," I answered, "that you came to church to-day in the hope to rid yourself of, or at least to weaken, those dangerous feelings which you told me of yesterday?"

"That's about it, miss," returned my companion. "But in regardin' to them Devils, mind, I'm not a-goin' to bind myself as I shall get ird o'm certain, though willin' to part wi' em too. Ther'," continued Mr. Body, profoundly, stooping his great shoulders and rounding his eyes after his peculiar manner, "what a man *can* do, he can; but what a man *can't* do, he mid try, but 'taint never no good."

Having pondered this utterance for a short time, I felt that I might safely reply, "Very true."

At this moment Mr. Body took out of his coat pocket a square packet enclosed in rather tumbled newspaper, and tied (in a well-meaning but decidedly make-shift manner) with a piece of exceedingly coarse string.

"Ma'am," he said, with a ceremonious air, as he held the packet out before him, "I zeed as you took to heart sharp them words as I zaid eesterday, aggen that ther' blasted——"

Here Mr. Body coughed; correcting himself, he resumed,—

"Aggen him as shaan't have no neäme. An' at night-time I turned roun' an' roun' what you'd a-told I, not vorgettin' yer veäce—as were the colour o' the roäd to show as you was in earnest. Wal, thinks I, I didn't ought to despise what she've a-zaid; an' I don't mind if I do let her know as I won't kip alive the madness by no wilfulness o' mine; an' I'll gie her that ther' d——" (Here a second cough took place.) "That ther' veller's pictur', to put in the vire herself if she's a mind to't—as 'll show I do wish right. Vor ther' was zummat proper in what she told I about a-teäkin' vengeance by bringin' roun' the poor gell herself, 'stead o' goin' to work t'other way. Zoo here's the pictur', miss, vor 'e to make away wi'—jest to show 'e as I don't wish to go aggen 'e; an' not without baggin' pardon twice over, vor that okkard trick as the poor gal put me up to, to write the letter as 'ud a-been better not wrote at aal."

Here Mr. Body presented to me the tumbled news-

paper packet, tied with exceedingly coarse string. Poor fellow! He meant well; and if the sequel instanced the frangibility of human purposes, this present act, taken in connection with his visit to the church with the object of improving his state of mind, proved simplicity and rightness of intention. To have good intentions, even if they are subsequently broken, must, I should think, be considerably better than to have none.

We now stood together inside the inn door. Mr. Body said he should leave the place that afternoon, and he respectfully bowed me a farewell. In doing so he added,—

“If I mid make bold to zay it, miss, I should hope as there weren’t nothin’ amiss to bring a young lady so var aal by herself, wi’ nothin’ about her in partiklar? An’ if ’twas money as run short, I shouldn’ mind a-layin’ down a zuvverin’ or two (though none zo vlush o’ cash myself) to square up that ther’ little job t’other zide o’ the peäge.”

I could hardly resist a smile at Mr. Body’s estimate of my situation—one which he had no doubt derived from the landlady of the “Black Boar.” His notion of compensating me by means of a pecuniary loan for the wrong which he had formerly done me, made me feel thoroughly ashamed of him; insomuch that I began to grow hot about the cheeks on his account. But I soon saw that my shame was wasted, for that he was highly pleased with his proposal. I therefore turned to the more profitable exercise of endeavouring to appreciate the worth of his intentions.

“Thank you,” I presently answered, “but I am not in want of money. I came here in a hurry, which is one reason why I have so few belongings ‘about me,’ as you

say. Your inquiries are kind. I may tell you that I am *not* so happy as I might be. Perhaps we may meet one day under brighter circumstances for both. I shall think of you henceforth without harshness. Mind my advice, for God's sake ! Good-by."

"Good-by, ma'am," replied the huge man, "wishin' hearty as I mid have the power to do as you do zay ! But," he concluded, his eyes kindling as though in the perception of some novel and weighty truth :—"in regardin' to them devils I beänt a-goin' to bind myself ! What a man *can* do, he can ; but what a man *can't* do, he mid try, but 'taint never no good."

As before I held myself justified in answering "very true."

Two hours later I sat down opposite the fire in my sitting room, intending to burn the likeness. I had found myself for no good reason deferring the moment of its destruction—waiting till I had dined, till I had written to my mother, &c. ; and even now that all my excuses for procrastination were exhausted, I felt that I could not give the packet to the flames without some further hesitation.

In how singular a manner had I become possessed of the portrait ! How little did he who had entrusted it to me imagine my interest in the man whom it represented, or dream what my real motive had been in making the earnest appeal which had led to its relinquishment ! Lengthy meditation followed these first reflections, in the course of which I regarded my strangely-acquired possession under two main aspects.

First:—as the confiscated property of the beautiful,

and — as I could not help feeling — the *bad* girl, who was alternate with me in Mr. Tyndal's affection; as a relic which she—my rival, my ruin, had doubtless prized and doted on. And how, I asked myself in passing, had she become its possessor?—for was it likely that its original had willingly, or even knowingly, surrendered to the object of his shameful love, so damaging a proof of his association with her? Regarded in reference to Mary Murgatroyd, the portrait was altogether hateful to me; a poisonous, abhorrent thing; a heretic calling for religious denunciation, and an immediate Act of Faith. While my thoughts were bent in this direction my cheek burned almost fiercely enough to have itself consumed the packet. I opened a cavern in the fire, and placed the parcel between the bars.

But when the deed was so far done; when I saw the paper smoking and singeing—then I realized that the thing threatened with destruction was the presentment of my own dear lover! This was my second principal view of Mr. Body's pledge; and it acted on my conduct even more directly than the first:—I quickly drew the packet from the fire; blew out the flame; untied the coarse string; stripped off the paper covering. The morocco case inside was uninjured.

A likeness of Robert!—was I obliged to destroy it? I laid it on my lap to consider the question.

This case was not much dissimilar from that of the portrait which he had given *me*. What a holy treasure that gift had been! How I had yearned over it, almost worshipped it! Would his face in this look so pure, so

noble, so manly, as it had done in that? Possibly the slight, subtle curve of the lip, which the other likeness had not shown to my full satisfaction, might here be better displayed. At all events I could look and see: I had not undertaken to burn the portrait without examining it. "Let me enjoy the face for a moment," said Love, "and Duty can destroy the picture afterwards."

My heart completely melted as I adopted this resolution, and poured itself forth in outspoken words. "My dearest, my dearest," I sobbed, addressing the morocco-leather case as representing Mr. Tyndal—and doing it, I believe, in a manner more melodramatic than I was aware of at the time—"however you have fallen short of yourself; however black and base your sin may have been, I love you still—with all my heart and soul,—for I cannot, cannot help it!"

And now, tenderness only possessing me, I made to myself a solemn vow. I vowed that whatever outward renunciation of my lover decency might demand, I would never again—until he should lawfully bind himself in marriage to another woman—attempt inwardly to suppress, or even to combat, my love for him: I would never try to think I could live without loving him; on the contrary, I would countenance and encourage my affection, as the main stay and solace of an enfeebled and saddened existence. The reader will observe that notwithstanding my recent elevation into the calm atmosphere of a heavenly philosophy, I was still exposed in some degree to those strong and variable currents of feeling which are wont to move about this lower world.

To proceed :—I opened the likeness, eager to discover that slight, subtle curve of the lip before-mentioned. The portrait was a photograph ; a good one, as a single glance told me ; but executed on glass after the primitive manner of those days. Photography at large has much to answer for, in having greatly increased one's natural dislike to one's fellow-creatures ; but in the present instance the sun had succeeded in producing a pleasing delineation. The reader will say, however, that I was so strongly prejudiced in favour of the face, as to be but a poor judge of its general acceptability under any phase. I answer : let the reader delay his criticism for a moment longer.

What meant the fixed incredulous stare with which I found myself regarding the likeness? What the sudden plunge, the stoppage, the gallop of my heart—the weak intensity of my wonderment—the birth, at last, of vital hope, amidst the painful throes of my bewildered understanding?

The face upon which my eye rested was not the face of my dearest. But I knew the features well : I had seen them on three occasions—at each succeeding time with increased though unaccountable distrust.

They were the features of Mr. Cýril Papillon.

CHAPTER X.

RALPH GIVES ME THE CUP OF ASSURANCE.

The which I took,
And pledging all the mortals of the world
And all the dead whose names are in our lips,
Drank.—*Keats*.

No sooner had I received into my mind—and heart—the startling testimony of the portrait, than I dressed myself for walking, and went out. I scarcely know why I did this. Perhaps my agitated feelings naturally expressed themselves in bodily motion; or perhaps my childish experiences of open-air happiness—in the Westford garden—insensibly inclined me to expect a full revival of hope and joy in the open air now. There was at least nothing attractive in the weather to draw me beyond doors. Yesterday's cold air still prevailed; and the rays that pierced it owned no warming power. The combination jarred upon my whole frame when I encountered it, as I have known garish combinations of ill-assorted colour jar upon my sense of sight. On, however, I went; and having walked briskly for some distance, came to a stand upon a "brig" that crossed the neighbouring beck. The

hubbub of the waters not inaptly represented the hubbub of my thoughts.

But notwithstanding this mental noise—if I may be permitted the term—one voice, that of hope, was lifted within me above all others. I accepted without question the testimony of the witness whose evidence had last reached me. I once more recurred to the belief—and now my faith owned a solid fact for its foundation—that poor Mary had indeed charged Robert Tyndal with a sin of which he was guiltless. But I saw that her deceit must have been more daring, more radical, than I had at first supposed. I was unable, however, to follow up any conjectures either as to the precise scope of her falsehood, or as to the method by which she had practised it: I did not possess the materials for so doing. I passed on, therefore, to consider—as well as in my present mood I was able to consider anything—what I knew of Mr. Cyril Papillon which might be held to support the evidence of the likeness. I eagerly searched amongst the scraps of that man's history which were laid by in my mind, for confirmation of the mute but meaning statement of the photograph.

And at this point I became aware that I lay under weighty obligations to the lad Arthur Bayley. It will be remembered that the boy, full of gratitude to me for speaking the word which had issued in his advancement, and of a kindred regret at having once been unintentionally instrumental in annoying me, had called at our lodgings to make known to me the name of my hitherto anonymous threatener. Amidst the exuberance of his feelings he had expanded his communication into a full

relation of the circumstances attendant upon a certain visit paid by Mr. George Body to the *Universal Live Stock Insurance Office*. Of the narration thus extended, which had been listened to at the time with mere indulgence, every particular was now eagerly recalled, and carefully weighed.

As the result of the searching review thus prosecuted, I recollected and arranged the following facts:—That the manager had exhibited such concern on seeing Mr. Body at the office as to imply that he identified him unexpectedly, and with annoyance, fear, or some other disquieting mental emotion. That upon the boy's repeating to the manager the words used by Body to express the object of his visit to London, the manager's disquietude had been still more plainly evinced. That the manager had then and there announced his intention of leaving London—in other words, (perhaps) of getting out of Mr. Body's way—for a fortnight. And to these facts I added the still more striking one mentioned to me by Bayley on a later occasion than that above referred to—the fact that the manager had summarily dismissed George Body, on slight excuse, from the post previously held by him as local Inspector to the Live Stock Insurance Society.

Taking all this into consideration, together with Mr. Body's own story, and with the fact that Mr. Papillon had often been at Westford during the last fifteen months, how could I fail to draw from the whole much that was confirmatory of the portrait's testimony, and that justified my own hope? I gave an audible groan of relief as I apprehended the consistency of the various evidence.

Nevertheless Fear was not completely dismissed from my mind. He and Confidence still maintained a see-saw there, in which, although Confidence generally kept Fear high in the air and laughed at his difficulties, yet there were times when Fear came steadily to the ground, and when, planting his heels, he made in his turn a derisive face at Confidence. "So," I sighed, "it must needs be for the present. Oh! for some clear, friendly intelligence to show me what I *ought* to believe; to call up visibly before me the worst—if, indeed, the worst be true—that there might be an end of all suspense, at once and for ever." No doubt this anxiety to confront the dreaded evil proved the force of my conviction that the evil did not really exist; but at the same time I trembled as I breathed the challenge. Similarly I had once demanded in my childhood that if there were any such beings as ghosts they would straightway every one of them appear before me: I had strongly believed the balance of chances to be against their existence; but it had been a dread word that summoned the pale possibilities to my presence.

Every one knows what it is to awake from a reverie in a vague fear of having spoken one's thoughts aloud. This I now did; my uneasiness being increased by the discovery that a pedestrian upon the road was quickly approaching me. I watched him to learn whether he had heard me speak to myself. It seemed that he had not; for his face was fixedly bent on the ground before him, and he paced rapidly and steadily forwards in the direction of the town, as though conscious neither of me nor of anything else, except his own purpose, whatever that might

be. My eyes were not withdrawn from the traveller even when they had informed me that he was ignorant of any words which I might unintentionally have uttered. Something in the countenance and figure awakened a recollection and excited interest. The stooping shoulders; the soft abundant hair, thickly sprinkled with grey, seemed familiar: so did the general deportment—dignified by a kind of sad determination; so did the features of the face — pale, resolute, and calm. The passenger neared, reached me: he looked up: our eyes met—it was Ralph Thain.

“Lucy, are you well?”

The question was asked in a tone showing no astonishment at the meeting; but the muscles of Ralph’s face worked after the old manner as he spoke, telling me that his feelings were some-how interested in the encounter. So were mine; and I doubt not that my countenance said as much.

“Perfectly,” I answered. “Ralph, what brings you here?”

“I come from your mother, who is very unhappy about you. I come to take you back to her.”

“You seem tired and faint, Mr. Ralph.” (I found myself using the old formula of address as my first anxiety of surprise wore off.) “You have walked very far. How far? Where did you leave the train?”

“No matter, Lucy” (with a smile). “I come now from the place you went to yesterday. The registrar told me you had left his house for the town yonder: I was on my way there to find you.”

“But how come you to be my mother’s messenger?”

How did you know she was anxious? What took you to London, and to her?"

"Questions that are easily answered, Lucy. There is nothing of mystery, not very much even of coincidence in the story. My father yesterday carried out his earnest wish, and went to town; he is still unwell—and I therefore travelled with him. We went, as had been planned, to the Crescent; there I heard, of course, of your disappearance, and of its cause. I was not without the means of guessing—almost of ascertaining—where you were gone; and I followed you, to protect, and take you back."

"How kind, Mr. Ralph; this is just like you. But tell me, is my mother very anxious?"

"Your mother is very anxious—naturally."

"Poor dear! And I have been so selfish, so forgetful of her and Esther in my distress! I see this now; but I did not see it so plainly at first."

"Be satisfied, Lucy, they will not see it at all plainly at home, when they have you back. And if you are dreading a harsh judgment from me, I can assure you I am far too conscious of selfishness of my own, to be capable of charging any one else with it—least of all *you*, Lucy."

A certain deep and settled sadness about his manner had oppressed, this tenderness touched me: I said warmly,—

"You were always so indulgent to me, Mr. Ralph."

"Indulgent?" he repeated, half absently.

Many and strange were the feelings which it cost me to find myself again—and so unexpectedly—in the society of my girlhood's first fancy and admiration: he now a married man, and myself the holocaust upon an altar dedi-

cated, not to his worship, but to the worship of an entirely different divinity. To be with him thus was like passing through the altered rooms of the house that once was home—now home no longer; like reading old letters from loving writers past away. An aching of heart and throat visited me, which it was not possible immediately to dismiss.

Ralph and I were now walking together with our faces towards the town. For a while the spell of bygone days remained around me, and probably around my companion too: neither his tongue stirred nor mine. But “death in life” cannot, after all, successfully compete for any considerable length of time with life itself—and life with me just now was doubly quick. I could not long refrain from broaching that subject of deep present interest to me which, after a brief deposition, had resumed its previous sway over my thoughts and feelings.

“Ralph,” I began timidly, fearing the opinion which he might have formed of my expedition to Farsdale, “are you shocked at my having undertaken so painful an investigation as that which brings me here? I am longing for your judgment; and not only on my own conduct, but on the facts of the story which has made me so miserable, and which perhaps has led me to act wrongly.”

My appeal drew from him his kindest expression of face and his gentlest tone of voice. He said,—

“To me, Lucy, it is a sufficient justification of what you have done that *you have done it*. Do not start, and protest—there is truth, not flattery, in what I say. Any investigation would be pure, if conducted from motives as pure as yours. Remember, then, that I do not condemn

the step you have taken ; but I *do* wish to relieve you from the necessity of going farther. Let *me*, henceforth, bear all the annoyances of your inquiry. I look on your journey with no feeling but one of pity for the distress and toil to which your gentle, sensitive little self has been subjected in undertaking it. Ah ! I know what it must be when such faith as yours fears that it has been falsely based ! But need a wicked slip of paper have set such faith fearing ? Poor Lucy ! I must not forget that she is a woman—with all a woman's confidence in print and signatures ; and also a woman of perfect truthfulness—therefore unable to conceive of deliberate falsehood in another. But be comforted now at any rate. I have a theory—nay, a conviction—on the subject which has troubled you. I need but a single item more evidence—and I will prove that you have been the victim of a shameful lie. Wait till I have obtained that item : meanwhile be easy and thankful.”

What substantial hope, what keen delight, were in these words ! My heart beat fast ; what if the item of evidence I possessed were the very one needed ? I hastened to make known what I was indeed unable to suppress : I told the story of the portrait ; how, why, from whom I had obtained it.

The tale was heard with an interest which at once declared that it contained the missing link ; but it was heard without the least surprise. It seemed to have been anticipated in all its leading features : for instance, Ralph had clearly contemplated the possibility of my meeting with Mr. Body. How was it that the distressing business in which I had lately been involved had come under his

consideration? What preliminary discoveries had prepared him for my present disclosure? What had inclined him, by what means had he been able, to make those discoveries? Although I could not answer such questions, I saw that their solution must involve a new and striking proof of his desire to serve me.

In conversation with Ralph I often first discovered my own changes of feeling by seeing those changes reflected in his face—such was the readiness of his sympathy. In this way I now learned that I was eager to know by what process he had come to the knowledge which his late remarks and present bearing implied; for I observed a consciousness of my curiosity in his eyes, and marked that he was carefully preparing to gratify that curiosity. He had made but few comments upon my recital; now that it was finished he walked on silently for some seconds, evidently considering how best to arrange, and to express in words, what he had to tell me. He presently said:—

“Not long since, Lucy, the lad whose poverty excited your pity, and whose honest character, by the way, fully justifies your faith, returned home (as I believe you know) for his holiday. While staying in the neighbourhood he called at my office; and reported to me, as he had before reported to you, the name and address of your former threatener. Having excellent reasons for wishing to serve you in any small way in my power, I took an early opportunity of visiting Mr. Body’s house, intending to chastise him morally, (and if I should find it needful and practicable, legally also), for his offence against your peace of mind. He was from home, and my communications were

held with his mother. To her I made my complaint, and from her I required some explanation of the threatening letter. Upon this she told me the full story of her son's attachment to your former servant; of the girl's demand that he should write the letter in question; of her subsequent disgraceful flight from the home which had been hospitably afforded her in her emergency, and from the too compliant lover, whose fidelity she had made use of, but would not reward. You may suppose that the subject was one upon which the old woman felt strongly. Herself struggling head and hands to maintain the little farming operations which her son's disappointment was leading him to neglect, she naturally expatiated upon the occurrences that had made him unfit for his proper work. The story went farther; the perpetrator of all the mischief was mentioned. Whispered reports concerning the person and appearance of the evildoer were repeated to me. Lucy, you will hardly guess why, how should you? but I am treading on dangerous ground here. It happened—no matter from what cause—that I entertained, as I entertain to-day, a certain dislike and distrust; the whispers I heard recalled the individual so disliked and so distrusted; a few coincidences of dates confirmed the dawning suspicion: so did some newly-remembered incidents of Mr. Body's visit to the London Office, as recounted to me by the lad Bayley. The end was, that when, on my arrival in town, I heard of your distress, I possessed good reason for believing it to be unfounded, and therefore an additional motive for undertaking my present mission. I came to comfort your mind, if possible, as well as to take you home. I came

requiring, indeed, a little more evidence ; but that I have now obtained.

“ Enough is said, Lucy—I blush to have said so much ; but it was necessary. Stay, I see that your doubts, even yet, are not completely satisfied : I must go on farther still. You wonder how the wicked falsehood which has caused so much sorrow could have been effected ? The answer is that in recording births of that description which has been under your notice, a registrar is obliged, by the official regulations of his department, to insert in the register book, on the *demand* of the mother, any name which she may give as being that of the child’s father. Mary Murgatroyd, apparently cherishing resentment towards you for her dismissal from your father’s house, has beyond question discovered and availed herself of this obligation. I have no longer any doubt that she has committed perjury—to this crime the falsification of a register legally amounts—for the sake of herself inflicting the revenge which she had before threatened in a vague form through her rustic lover. Lucy, are you convinced ? You may be. I am a lawyer, you know, and on this occasion I have put two and two together more carefully than you dream. Think of the ugly matter no more, I entreat you.”

“ Bless you, bless you a thousand times,” I said—too happy, too grateful to say more. Such pleasure overspread his face when he heard my words and saw my joy as I had rarely seen there before.

Soon after we entered the town.

“ Come Lucy,” he said, as we approached the inn, “ I suppose this is your hotel—the ‘ Black Boar ? ’ Tut,

tut! I do not like your solitary expedition a bit:—the truth you see, will out. Well, the first thing to-morrow I take you home, so never mind. Mrs. Landlady,” he added in a firm but quiet way, as we gained the inn-door, “I trust you have paid every attention to this lady? Make her comfortable to-night pray, if you value the reputation of your house. Go to your rooms, Lucy: I shall betake myself to the ‘commercial’ quarter I suppose,—since I am so largely concerned in commerce!”

The landlady came out curtseying and smiling; looking too, as I thought, a little guilty as well. There was real importance and dignity about Ralph, despite his moderate stature and frequently defective manner; and I never felt this more than now. Nothing could have been less impressive than the circumstances of his arrival; he came a-foot—on the day when travelling is not respectable—without luggage, save the small bag he carried—ill-dressed, and splashed to the head with mud: yet instant homage and obedience were rendered him by all at the “Black Boar;” and from the moment of his advent thither the attention shown to me was multiplied tenfold—doubtless on his account. It was characteristic of him, however, to be unconscious of the influence thus exercised by him on others; and I believe he was often most oppressed by a sense of inferiority when his fellows were most ready to own him superior.

“Do I not see you again then till to-morrow?” I asked as he left me.

“No, Lucy, I must rest I think; at least I must be alone.”

His pupils dilated just in the old way as he said it,

implying perhaps that the words had a meaning which he thought I had better not know, but which they too nearly suggested. It was a meaning, however, that I did not catch.

"But, Mr. Ralph," I objected, unwilling to part from him, "I want to hear all about Margaret in her new home; how *she* appears there; how *it* appears under her rule."

He paused and looked back, saying hurriedly :—

"Well, Lucy, she appears there quite as lovely as she appears everywhere—what could you wish to know, or I to tell, more than that? But if the house has not robbed her of her beauty, she has certainly robbed the house of much of its ugliness. She has replaced the chintz curtains in the drawing-room with others of satin damask. The faded red silk annuals, and the pitiful 'Books of (more than doubtful) Beauty' have vanished at her word; and are supposed to be either the property of the buttermilk, or else—better still—behind the fire. As to the garden, she has transformed it. Paths that were once straight, and of turf, are now serpentine and of gravel; scarlet geraniums flourish, where *Love lies bleeding* languished—stay, I anticipate: for summer, I remember, has not yet brought about this last change. The entire alterations, however, are radical, and far from being confined to externals:—for instance, false sentiment has completely given place to true—and to symbolize the improvement, Tennyson's poems have supplanted those of L. E. L. Come, you have information enough by this time, I am sure: so good-by."

Was there bitterness and irony in these words? I

thought so, and was disturbed at the thought. I should probably have been more disturbed still, but for my pre-occupation with those peaceful and happy meditations which Ralph's recent argument justified me in indulging.

As the afternoon wore away—and my growing eagerness to be at home again made it appear to be made of unusually tough materials—I found myself going through numberless meetings and explanations with Robert. Now he received me silently, reproaching my late doubts only with his eyes: now he chid me openly, saying that he would not have distrusted *me*, had all the world signed and sworn me false. But it always came at last to my begging him to see in what I had felt and done my horror that his dear name had been blackened, my longing to remove the stain, and to convict his detractors of calumny; and, as may well be imagined, he invariably showed himself willing to accept the view of the matter thus urged upon his attention.

So, then, the clouds which had heavily overshadowed the prospect of my life, were unexpectedly dissipated, and the sun of hope once more shone upon my future. But my feelings were chastened, my joy was qualified. The conviction which had visited me in the hour of my darkness—that the wildest vicissitudes of human experience must needs be instrumental in effecting the designs of Heaven—gathered, now that I walked again in light, an almost oppressive force: it formed itself into a precise and solemn persuasion that my late suffering and present relief had been sent me for some definite, weighty end—an end soon, perhaps, to be reached and recognized: it

became a presentiment, never indeed subversive of my peace, but full of grave though vague expectation. Nor was there wanting in my mind a humbling self-blame for the impetuous part which I had lately played : and other reflections involving some additional depression of my spirits were likewise with me,—amongst which arose a mis-giving founded on the remembrance that Mr. Body was still relying, for the *name* of his enemy and rival, upon the evidence of the mendacious register :—a circumstance which, as I could not help seeing, might possibly lead to serious mischief.

I retired to my room early, for a message from Ralph in the course of the evening had informed me that we must start early on the next day. Something like a repetition of the previous night's dream came to me as I slept. Again my brother Frank was with me, urging the forgiveness of a wrong which I neither felt nor understood : but a joyful waking obliterated the record of the night's sad and perplexing fancies ; and rising, I was able to fling back all shadowy curtains of the mind, as easily as those of the window.

While, however, we were waiting for the fly which was to take us from the "Black Boar," I happened to recall the dreams which I had dreamt—and spoke of them to Ralph ; dwelling, probably, upon their great vividness and seeming long continuance on both nights. He listened attentively, and at the end of my story exclaimed :—"Singular indeed ! And who can tell that you may not soon be called upon to exercise forgiveness to a most singular extent?"

Was Ralph becoming rather superstitious? So it seemed: and I had noticed a display of the same tendency in his comments upon old Mr. Thain's desire for another interview with my father. I answered laughing:—

“Well, Mr. Ralph, only be the wrongdoer yourself, and I will undertake to forgive any amount of wrongs.”

Many hours we travelled together that day. My companion's thoughtful care for me was marvellous: no bridegroom bearing off his bride could have been more tenderly solicitous for her comfort than he was for mine. But I thought that any small reciprocation of his kindness which I might show him, any verbal acknowledgment of attention that I might utter, seemed invariably to be distasteful and unwelcome. His peculiarities certainly appeared to be increasing. No right-minded person likes to have favours heaped upon him without being granted what may be called *redress*: this Ralph seemed to forget in his intercourse with me.

There was not much conversation between us on the road: I had many things to think over silently; and so, to all appearance, had Ralph. Once indeed the silence was broken for a considerable time. On this occasion Ralph told me of great professional successes recently gained by him, of extensive railway conveyancing, of new and distinguished clients, of another lucrative local appointment just secured. His excitement while speaking of this advancement presented a striking contrast to his previous quiescence; but I tried to throw myself into his mood, although it struck me as being unnatural and unlike him—considering that my disabled father was a member of his

own profession in his own town—to dwell upon his business triumphs in conversation with me. I tried, I repeat, to throw myself into his mood ; and I succeeded. I heartily rejoiced ; warmly congratulated. My feelings indeed carried me away ; and I divulged a truth which might better, perhaps, have remained secret. Referring to the appointment gained by Ralph about the time of my brother's death, I disclosed what Ralph had, it appeared, never before suspected :—viz., that my brother had abandoned his own candidature for the post on purpose that Ralph's might be successful ; and that at the very time of the accident which had proved fatal to him he had been engaged upon a mission the object of which had been to secure the auditorship for his friend.

This injudicious announcement of mine immediately threw Ralph into great dejection. I had desired to respond to his apparent exultation by showing the interest felt by my family in his professional progress ; and Frank's generous exertions on his behalf had seemed apposite to my argument. But no sooner was the revelation made than I recognized the blunder I had committed in making it. I now saw what I had overlooked before—that to let Ralph know of my brother's conduct was to reveal an obligation which I ought to have been the last person to disclose.

And yet the keen suffering which Ralph evidently felt at the reference to Frank must surely, I reflected, arise from something better, deeper, truer than a mere proud impatience of indebtedness ? As I noted his renewed silence, his melancholy eye, his pallid face, I became

certain of this ; and marvelled at his enduring sorrow for the lost friend whose end even I, the dead man's sister, could now consider with a moderated and resigned regret.

My mother's arms, and Esther's, were about me before many hours more had passed. The meeting brought me much joy—but much self-reproach also. As soon as I was a little rested my mother put a letter into my hands : it was from Robert to herself. I learned afterwards that on the first evening of our sorrow she had written to him a full statement of what had been communicated to us—despatching her letter the next day : this, his reply, had been forwarded by return of post. It was short, and these were its words:—

“ MY DEAR MRS. FITZADAM,—

“ YOU are justly shocked at the document that has been sent to you : so, more than I can express, am I. You show confidence in me by writing fully and promptly on the subject : thank God ! I am not unworthy of the confidence. You shall shortly have conclusive proof that either the pretended certificate, or the entry of which it is a copy, is false : meanwhile give me my due, and trust me : to do otherwise would be to commit such an injustice as I am sure you would rather not have upon your conscience. My dear love to Lucy. She will never doubt me, I know.

“ Yours affectionately,

“ R. T.”

CHAPTER XI.

EVANGELICAL LUMINARIES, OF REAL BUT NOT QUITE
UNSPOTTED BRIGHTNESS.

The very source and fount of day
Is dashed with wandering isles of night.
TENNYSON.

THE mixed sensations of joy and compunction which Robert's letter caused me were for a time suspended while I went to pay a visit to dear old Mr. Thain, who, exhausted by the journey which he had perhaps prematurely undertaken, was at present keeping his room. To see his familiar but now debilitated figure; to hear his kindly words of self-forgetful regard; to realize the power of his devotion to us, and the eagerness of his desire for our happiness, was necessarily to forget all but his goodness, and to lose for a while every feeling save those of affection and gratitude towards himself.

He was altered. It was but the wreck of him that I now saw—and the expression must be understood as owning a double force, for never since I had known Mr. Thain had he appeared otherwise than as a wreck. Mortality had stolen a new march upon this kindly life. But in no circumstances had the benevolence of our old friend's

nature been so brightly evident as it now was amidst the shadowy encompassment of an enfeebled physical frame. "The One remains," sings the poet, "the many change and pass." Yes; and those simple qualities which come from God and are likest God's will endure and grow evermore, though the complex outer man decline and fade away. Mr. Thain's outer man, I may remark, had the appearance of unusual complication, its various mechanisms being not only singularly prominent in their operation, but also seemingly involved—as though the whole structure had been rashly taken to pieces, and put together again erroneously.

At the close of my long talk with the old man I received a second letter which had arrived during my absence. It was addressed to myself by Robert's aunt, Miss Tyndal. Its object was to fix the date of my promised visit to her house at Westford, where, by an arrangement which I have before mentioned, Robert was himself shortly to meet me. The letter had been posted three days back; and the period suggested for my journey now seemed startlingly near. To-day was Monday: I was urged to go to Westford on the following Wednesday. It took me some time to realize that the date thus proposed was no earlier than I had expected it would be. The truth is I had an irrational feeling that the days wasted on my late distress did not represent an actual space of time at all; and this was the more extraordinary, since while they had lasted they had seemed extremely real, numerous, and long—like an extensive series of dull and anxious Saturdays. Reflection convinced me, however, that the summons now

under my consideration was timed exactly according to my anticipations; and the only question in reference to it seemed to be, whether I could write to-morrow and say that I would go to Westford the next day as I was asked to do. My mother thought that there were obstacles in the way of this plan, and that courtesy required a longer notice of my visit. The difficulty which arose in consequence was removed, as several other difficulties had been, by Ralph Thain, who announced his intention of returning to Westford early on the next day, and who promised to call upon Miss Tyndal immediately after his arrival, to tell her that I accepted her invitation, and at the same time to give her the opportunity of deferring my visit by letter, should my silence have led her to make plans which were incompatible with my reception at the specified time. I completed the matter by writing a pretty note for Ralph to deliver to Miss Tyndal—a note of apology and partial explanation, and of glad self-congratulation that I still possessed the hope of being able to join her according to her original wish.

By Esther's advice—or rather, direction—I retired to bed early. But I was in no state to sleep soon: I was simply too happy for repose. Robert's letter was under my pillow; and the manly dignity which it spoke thrilled my mind and heart with an eminently wakeful admiration. Why, I asked myself, had I not appealed to Robert direct at first? I could not tell; I cannot tell now; but I thought, and I think to-day, that my determination against such a course had been based upon a right instinct, although its superstructure had been too clearly out of taste.

When my mother's measured breathing told me that she slept, I got out of bed, and for the second time that night poured forth silently to Heaven from a brimming heart such thanks as could not have been expressed in language. I had known seasons when, lifted on the wings of some aspiring high-church ceremonial, my soul had really seemed to mount towards the Majesty above. I had known, under the influence of an opposite system, dread times of still nearer approach to God. But never before had my heart been so tenderly sensible as now it was, of the divine proximity and the divine benevolence together. My own experience of the life which He bestows and directs had been instrumental in bringing Him dearly near, as mere theological dogma had never been; and the truth concerning His ever-present goodness, lately proclaimed to me amidst the thunders of the storm, was now newly revealed in the soft whispers of delightful calm.

I remember well that amid the glad contentment of this happy hour I felt a strange new strength, a capability for exceptional duty and endurance; I remember that in the ardour of my trust I made these feelings into a prayer, and asked for opportunity to prove the reality of my confidence. I remember too that when some such petition had formed itself in my heart, I seemed to hear a responsive voice from above, telling me with something of solemnity and reproof, that what lessons I had learned I should assuredly need to recollect; that what strength I possessed I should shortly have ample occasion to exert; that to whomsoever much is given, of him unquestionably shall much be required.

The morning's post brought me a letter from Robert, expressing wonder that I did not write, and hope that nothing would prevent our meeting. To reply to this letter was for me the most important duty of the day; and it was a duty that I discharged in no perfunctory spirit. I thought it well to reserve for revelation at a personal conference the story of my journey to Yorkshire: my communication, therefore, while it confessed my recent anxiety, did not own the course of action to which the anxiety had driven me. It was indeed so full of tender assurances and protestations that there was no room left in it for narrative. Ralph had undertaken to inform Mr. Tyndal, in a letter to be written forthwith, of the discoveries in reference to Mr. Papillon; and he had promised to do this without showing that I had been instrumental in the completion of those discoveries. Thus Ralph's co-operation seemed fully to justify my silence for the present as to my late distressing enterprise; but I disliked this reticence while I practised it; and longed for the time when my meeting with Robert would give me opportunity for entire openness.

Ralph had left early according to his intention; and after I had despatched my letter to Robert, the remainder of the day was spent by me in conversation with old Mr. Thain (who was still obliged to abstain from all exertion) and in preparations for the expected journey of the morrow. The latter occupation was pleasant, as necessitating contrivance—an exercise generally agreeable to the female mind. What could be put into a valise would not now suffice me, for I was going to see Robert: I had

to employ my ingenuity upon the problem how to get into my largest trunk half as much again as it had been constructed to hold.

On the next day I found myself once more leaving home—Miss Tyndal's acceptance of my proposal not to put off my visit having been warmly expressed in her reply to my note. I was sorry to go away from my mother again so soon; but her evident delight at the contemplation of my expected happiness at Westford, convinced me that she had no wish to keep me in London, and that I need not entertain any to stay there.

I reached the Westford Station at four o'clock in the afternoon. The well-remembered carriage of the Miss Tyndals awaited me, the box of which was occupied as formerly by Stokes, the old man who acted as the ladies' gardener, and who, when required to do so, donned a stiff blue-coat with metal buttons, a pair of white cotton gloves much too long in the fingers, and a tall hat that seemed a total stranger to the hat-brush: thus accoutred, he had driven—or rather abstained from driving—ever since I could remember, the wall-eyed chestnut which rudely answered the purposes of a horse to his employers. He was a man of melancholy visage, and of few words. His mistresses, I believe—who, it must be remembered, were ladies of strong evangelical proclivities—held his spiritual state to be one of promise, but not wholly satisfactory: they recognized in him many good qualities, amongst which I should think they must have numbered his unswerving fidelity to themselves; but they feared that his virtues might flow from a "legal" source. He seemed, they

were accustomed to say, "to experience no joy and peace in believing."

The chestnut horse walked homewards with a great deal of composure and deliberation: my bodily progress was necessarily no more rapid than his, but my heart ran on ahead at quite a different pace. To many a gable, and gate, and lamp-post I gave a most impassioned greeting; but by a strange contradiction I felt a foolish unwillingness to recognize people that I knew; and when my old dress-maker saw me in passing and gave me a pleased bow I caught myself affecting not to remember who she was.

Miss Tyndal received me kindly at her front door. She was a good and worthy woman. Her face, which was not fundamentally an agreeable one—having the wide nostrils, and the forced and rather spiteful expression of patience which belongs to a camel's face—was nevertheless by no means incapable of creating pleasant impressions: it often gave evidence of a warm and true heart in successful combat with a naturally ungracious temper. Miss Helen Tyndal, younger, stouter, supposed to be less "weaned from the world" than her sister; possessing a throaty, emphatic voice, eight ringlets only three-fourths grey, and (perhaps) a lingering hope of matrimony—was even more demonstrative towards me on my arrival than the elder lady. But they alike welcomed me with kisses, and with several other tokens of affection.

The Miss Tyndals had come down in the world. Their father had once made a good fortune as a cloth manufacturer; but, afterwards failing in business, he had died before retrieving his former wealth. The daughters

had been left but moderately well off. In their weaker and more earthly-minded moments they were full of sentimental regrets for the loss of antecedent glories ; but they generally showed themselves able to make the best of present competency, and to devote themselves with zeal to what they held to be present duty. If they interspersed among their good deeds a great many Scriptural quotations ; if they distributed tracts in an indiscriminate manner which some held to be arrogant and offensive, I never met with any who questioned the essential purity of their intentions ; and undoubtedly their evangelizing efforts were appreciated by many.

It was amusing to me, now that I found myself in the house of these good ladies again, to recall the awe and alarm with which I had regarded them and their surroundings as a child. My mother had formerly exposed me—in perfect ignorance of what she was doing—to suffering of a peculiar and intense kind, by often bringing me with her to pay them morning calls. With the quickness to perceive and to infer which belongs to childhood, I had first grasped the facts that the Miss Tyndals were religious and unfortunate, and had then concluded that they considered it wicked to be in easy circumstances as we were. Thus I had always visited them with something of the guilt of Dives on my conscience, and with a dreadful determination in my mind—which was the more oppressive of the two—never to be religious on such terms as I believed them to hold requisite. My imagination had gone on to attribute to their very furniture the censoriousness towards me which I thought they entertained themselves.

The tall harp in the drawing-room, enveloped in pale Holland bound with green, had appeared to convict me of possessing at least an evil spirit if not a javelin ; the rigid ebony chairs, covered with chintz of the once popular leopard pattern, had seemed to prove me spiritually black as the Ethiopian, and morally disfigured with indelible spots like those of the leopard ; while the ancient cabinet full of oriental and other curiosities had whispered an accusation no less terrible :—somewhere within its recesses—and communicating their horror to its entire self—had lurked two fetiches or idols, not only directly recalling the “ heathen in his blindness ” who “ bows down to wood and stone,” but also mysteriously suggestive of my own virtual identity with that unhappy being !

And, indeed, notwithstanding the entertainment which a recollection of these things afforded me, I am not sure that, as I now sat down with the ladies to partake of a plain but ceremonious early tea, something of my ancient terror did not return to me. The old-fashioned silver tea-service seemed, in its rigid simplicity of design, to assimilate itself to the principles of its possessors, and to exist to a great extent for the purposes of religious vituperation ; and the high-shouldered teapot especially appeared to be filled with an animosity against me so considerable as only to be attributable to spiritual disapproval of the most conscientious kind ; it would not pour out my second cup of tea until operated on with a pin, and rocked to and fro longitudinally with great perseverance ; clearly it had scruples about satisfying the desire of a young woman of the world. Further evidence that my sensations at the

present time were not far different from those of childhood was forthcoming during the meal ; for in dealing with the extremely thin bread-and-butter, and with the wide-open china tea-cup, whose bottom was so soon reached, I found all the old difficulty in maintaining a show of occupation, without seeming greedy.

Between her sips and bites Miss Tyndal made somewhat personal religious observations, while her sister's remarks related principally to the domestic affairs of the townspeople ; in other words, Miss Helen was a relief. The younger lady, nevertheless, did not stay for any considerable time the stream of the elder's words : that stream presently flowed in upon me rather unpleasantly.

"And my dear," said Miss Tyndal, with mental reference, as it seemed, to her previous remarks of the same kind, "I really do venture to hope too—sometimes—that our dear Bertie, so eminently qualified as he is to shine as a servant of the Lord—may one day be brought into the household of faith."

I am afraid I was wickedly sensible at the moment of the elaborate rope-and-pulley system of Miss Tyndal's neck ; also of the hundred-and-one ends of white ribbon upon her cap ; the former seemed unpleasant, the latter absurd. But I made an attempt to check ungenerous reflections, and in doing so found courage to reply that I ventured to think Robert already in a satisfactory state of mind, and that I felt sure he was much more nearly right than I.

Miss Tyndal was wont to utter, at certain times, an inarticulate sound, prolonged and peculiar—a kind of

“hem,” expressive of amiable and compassionate doubt; in producing the sound she generally raised her chin, shook her cap, and looked down. She produced it now, with the usual accompaniments, adding with considerable expansion of the nostrils:—

“No doubt there have been great searchings of heart, dear fellow—great searchings of heart; but has the work gone farther?”

With her tea-cup stationary midway between the tea-tray and her lips, Miss Tyndal examined its contents closely and long, as though seeking therein the solution of the question. I might have closed the inquiry injudiciously, had it not been for Miss Helen, who here kindly interposed the remark:—

“Well, Ann, my dear, we would *hope* so. Perhaps our doubts, if we have any, should be told only to the Lord; turned into supplications at a throne of grace. We would *hope* that all is well.”

Miss Tyndal seemed to find in this answer a good reason for drinking up her tea. She drank it up at once; and at the same time I swallowed my displeasure.

I looked forward to family prayers with no little trepidation, for I remembered that after reading a “portion of Scripture,” it was Miss Tyndal’s custom to ask questions thereon of all present. I am glad to say that when the time came I acquitted myself creditably. A spiritually-minded cook, who was gifted with a keen scent for false-doctrine, set me right in one or two instances; but, on the other hand, I experienced support from Miss Helen, who gave my answers the benefit of a free translation into the

Calvinistic tongue, and who thus succeeded in maintaining their orthodoxy.

Alone in my room at night I owned the unreasonable-ness of expecting a perfect religion from any individuals of a race whose other productions are all imperfect; and the injustice of pretending that that must needs be hypocrisy, which is unfortunately attended by cant and prejudice. I determined—so far as my failings might suffer me—to honour the Miss Tyndals' goodness, despite the uncongenial form of some of its manifestations. As to that juvenile presumption which scoffs indiscriminately at "seriousness" of all kinds—a presumption of which in past days I had myself too often been guilty—I had learned to regard it now as a contemptible thing rooted in ignorance and stupidity: a thing as worthy to be condemned and punished as the tyrannous cruelty of a thoughtless schoolboy, or the senseless practical-joking of some shallow-brained idler.

It was wet to-night, heavily wet: the drip and patter of the rain kept me awake long. There was sadness in the sound; but my spirits were too elate to be influenced by it. Of Robert—coming next day, of blessings multiplied, and trouble dispelled, I thought with uninterrupted happiness and peace.

In the morning I sustained a disappointment:—Robert's visit was put off for three days. He did not say what detained him; but it was not difficult to account for his detention. I understood that his investigations with reference to Mary Murgatroyd's conduct were keeping him away.

I did not at once resign myself to the defeat of my

expectation; but time and reflection brought about an acquiescence which could not be attained at a moment's notice. At eleven o'clock I started in fair spirits to call upon Margaret Thain, whom I had a great desire to see and know as Ralph's wife.

Externally the Thains' house did not appear more cheerful than formerly. The stone of which it had been built was of that kind which, under the influences of time, weather, and smoke, becomes bleached on the prominences, and blackened in the interstices. To-day the building looked quite funereal. My cheerfulness, however, had so completely recovered during my walk that it was proof against such gloomy appearances. I gave an animated rap at the well-remembered front door, and the sound echoed through the big hall within.

"Is your mistress in?" I asked of the servant who presently appeared.

"No, miss," (with a strange and hesitating air).

"How soon will she be in?"

"I—I don't know, miss," answered the girl, with a stranger, more hesitating manner still.

CHAPTER XII.

A DESOLATED HOME AND HEART.

May this be true ? oh may it ? can it be ?
Is it by any wonder possible ?
Man, woman, what thing mortal can we trust
When friends and bosom wives prove so unjust.
HEYWOOD.

THE servant who had opened the door was a stranger to me. Surprised at her demeanour, I stepped inside and questioned her as follows :—

“ Where, then, is your mistress ? ”

“ I can’t say, miss.”

“ When did she leave home ? ”

“ Yesterday evening, miss.”

“ Your master, I suppose, I shall find at his office ? ”

“ No, miss ; he has not been at the office to-day. He is upstairs.”

“ Upstairs ! He is generally at his desk by nine. Go to him directly, if you please, and say that Miss Fitzadam is here. I hope he is not unwell ? ”

The girl hesitated.

“ He don’t wish to be disturbed, miss,” she faltered.

“Which room is your master in?” I inquired, not without impatience.

“In the study, miss—he never went to bed all night. If you’re a friend of the fam’ly I’m thankful as you’ve come, I’m sure; for cook and me don’t know what ever to do. I wish you *would* see master, indeed. P’r’aps you won’t mind going up to him with yourself? No; he never took his clothes off all night, nor had bit nor drop at breakfast; and he keeps continually walking up and down—up and down; just like—like anything.”

“I will go to your master.”

As I spoke I crossed the hall. I knew my way well. The study door was close at the top of the first flight of stairs: in a few moments I stood before it knocking for admittance.

No direct answer; but I fancied that I could hear Ralph, as he paced to and fro, mutter a feeble remonstrance. The old clock with the wrinkled face stood near: its crazy slipshod ticks seemed like satirical echoes of the footsteps within the closed door; its asthmatic whispers seemed to give an ugly articulateness to Ralph’s faint murmur, and to shape it into phrases of woe.

I knocked again, and louder than before. It was evident that the sound now arrested Ralph’s attention. He walked to the door and said in a low, firm voice:—

“I must be left alone.”

“Ralph!” I cried out, “it is Lucy Fitzadam. Surely you will see *me*? You cannot send *me* away?”

There was a few moments’ pause: then the lock turned, and I saw him before me.

What a face, what a form ! A volume of wretchedness was opened to me as I looked : I understood not its subject ; but its profundity was unmistakable. I had seen Ralph only two days since : he had then appeared, as always, grave and sad—yet calmly so. Now he showed himself wildly miserable. His countenance was a pale and ghastly mask ; his figure was bent and powerless.

“ Ralph ! ” I exclaimed, “ in God’s name what is the matter ? What can have happened to you in this short time ? ”

His old reserve seemed to come over him as he greeted me :—he gave me his hand with silent shyness. It burned like fire ; yet, as it met mine a chill shiver shook Ralph’s frame throughout, and, communicated by the touch, travelled icily and tremulously through my frame too. When he spoke, it was to say slowly the word “ Lucy,” and no more. I knew that his reserve was likely to continue unless I could show him good reasons for openness. I thought I could. Surely I had some claim upon his confidence ; some right to know and share his sorrow ?

“ Dear Mr. Ralph,” I said, “ we have been friends long—and good friends too : let there be no unfriendly reservation between us now. In all my griefs you have sympathized with me completely : do enable me to sympathize with you in your grief.”

“ Friends ! ” he exclaimed, “ sympathy !—Good God ! Yes,” he added, in a different tone ; “ yes, Lucy, you shall know all if you like : why not, indeed ? ”

As he finished, he staggered, and put his hand to his head. Many times, during the remainder of the scene I

thought he would have fallen to the ground. Another indication, which seemed, like the last, to point to bodily illness, was the lack of expression in his eye: an eye usually soft, liquid, and meaning, but now alarmingly stony, harsh, and stupid.

And here Ralph handed me a paper on which were penned some lines in Margaret's writing. I cannot reproduce those lines. They were a dread accusation against the writer's self—a confession of the worst which can happen to a wife. So abject they were, yet so pathetic; so unbelievable, but so awfully intelligible; so hideously candid, so hopelessly definite in their avowal of guilt, yet withal so instinct with a subtle remorseful tenderness which showed touching relationship to truth and virtue, that, as with burning half-blinded eyes I read them, I longed to sink into the earth and hide from the ruined and heart-broken husband who watched me read.

I can see him to this day as I saw him when I looked up from the sheet: his broad round forehead, from which the prematurely grey hair had lately receded, all lined and puckered; his cold lustreless eye, speaking the blank numbness of a suffering so keen as in a certain sense to be its own relief; his lips, firmly set according to old habit, but now with a meaningless firmness, and locked in a silence devoid of strength and significance.

A glance at the miserable man was enough to set all my feelings moving in a single direction: compassion for him now became my absorbing emotion. I remembered my own happy love; my late deliverance from despair and doubt: I thought of the dear letter in my pocket

received that morning, in which the announcement of a delayed journey was made by Robert the occasion for renewed and tender assurances of his faithful devotion. I contrasted my lot with the lot of poor forsaken Ralph. My very soul melted with pity for him. Gladly would I have given my life at that moment could I have made him happy again. It may be that the admiration—shall I say the *affection*?—for him, which I had known in my earlier girlhood, had never completely left me. In truth, I do not think it had; but be this as it may, my present commiseration for him was certainly as strong a feeling as I remember ever to have experienced.

I touched him caressingly, and was going to speak the little that I could of what I felt. But he hurriedly drew back. A stern, brief, decisive manner which I had seen foreshadowed in past days came over him.

“Lucy,” he said, lifting the forefinger of his right hand, “no word of sympathy, I adjure you.”

“Must I not try to tell you——” I began.

“You must try to tell me nothing till you know more.”

I was silent for a time; and a strange resistless restlessness seemed to seize him: he paced about hurriedly.

“Ralph,” I said presently, “you are clearly ill. Your sufferings have been too much for you: I can see disease in your face. Take my advice, and try to get some rest.”

A terrible smile curved his lips as he answered,—

“Do you really think me ill?”

“I do. Be persuaded to go to bed. You must have medical advice too, and that at once.”

An unusual light was kindled in his dimmed eye. He

approached me, seized both my hands, and held them as though in a vice: I could hardly help crying out from pain.

“Make me a promise, Lucy,” he whispered.

“I promise you to do anything you wish that is right and possible.”

“Promise me that when I am dying—do you think I shall die?—you will be there to hear my last words. Or at least promise me——”

Some pang of pain—whether mental or bodily I know not—or, as I afterwards thought possible, some sudden failure of memory, here stopped him. His eye again lost its electric brightness, and glared upon me sullen and opaque. My compassion was by this time taking the principal form of solicitude as to his bodily state; for it had become increasingly evident to me that some ravenous physical malady hovered over him: the shadow of the swarthy wings seemed to me every moment to gather deeper upon his weary face.

There was not a creature near to whom I could comfortably turn, at the present juncture, for counsel and aid. I saw that I must rely solely upon myself, if I were to be of any use to the sick and sorrow-stricken man. With this perception came the thought that my own happiness and strength had perhaps been given me expressly that I might be qualified to encourage and console him. The thought soon ripened into the full recognition of a divinely-appointed duty; and thereupon I set myself to perform that duty. It was clear that Ralph's corporeal requirements demanded my earliest attention. I first went down—

stairs and sent for the leading doctor of the town; then, returning to the study, I besought Ralph to go to bed with such earnestness and persistency, that he at last acceded to my wish and went.

I watched his reeling progress along the passage with the most painful concern; I should have offered him my arm and support but that I dreaded again evoking that stern impatience of my pity which he had lately displayed. On reaching his bedroom door he turned back and beckoned me: I followed, and stood beside him.

“You will not leave this house?” he said.

“Dear Mr. Ralph, no. I shall stay to nurse, and, if possible, to comfort you.”

“You undertake to remain—that is enough. You have something to hear before you go away.”

“I will hear anything that it will please or ease you to tell.”

And his haggard face and drooping figure disappeared.

Waiting for the doctor! how long, how helpless are the moments so spent! How quick is the imagination then; how deadly faint the heart! How strangely are weary languor and keen alertness commingled in one's bodily sensations! Waiting for the doctor now, I unceasingly paced the passage outside Ralph's room;—a soft new carpet had been laid when the bride was coming: my steps were not heard. My thoughts—if the then productions of my brain may so be styled—were all of the various possible diseases into which Ralph might be drifting. I scarcely remembered poor Margaret—still less considered that she was the root of the present bitterness.

There was much connected with her, much suggested by those extraordinary lines of her writing recently shown to me, which at another time would have roused within me a painfully eager curiosity. I knew not, I was unable to conceive, for whose sake she had cast away faith, duty, and everything best worth keeping. I could picture to myself no process delicately insidious enough to have wiled her dainty nature into coarse iniquity. The story which her pen had so singularly told was to me, in all save its leading features, an impenetrable mystery, although I had perceived that to Ralph it conveyed details of meaning definite and complete. Nevertheless, its riddles did not occupy me now : I was too anxious to learn, on reliable authority, what malady might be portended by the alarming manifestations of Ralph's countenance and behaviour.

I walked till my senses became dazed and numb—scarcely telling me when I stood at the light end of the passage where the stairs and window were, and when at the dark end, between the closed bedroom doors. The twisted balustrades of the staircase repeated themselves everywhere : pale spirals corresponding with them in outline seemed to run up before my eyes continually over wall and wainscot. The old clock appeared to whisper from all sides ; to meet, overtake, and accompany me with its shambling footsteps. Once or twice I stopped to listen at Ralph's door ; and my anxiety deepened at what I heard within. At last I could bear the suspense no longer ; and dressing hastily in the bonnet and shawl which I had hastily laid aside, I went downstairs intending to summon the doctor myself. I was stopped in the hall, however, by

the girl who had carried my message to him, and who told me that he was close at hand. The next minute he entered the house.

It had been a relief to me to learn from the servants that Margaret's parents were out of town; for I had clearly seen that their distress at her flight, had they been at hand to hear of it, must have tended to precipitate the publication of the truth. I was anxious to avoid, or at least defer, such a publication; and in order to disarm scandal, I had, in my brief interviews with the servants, referred to Margaret's departure with composure and straightforwardness. Upon them this course seemed to have produced something of the desired effect. With the doctor I knew that I must necessarily be more entirely candid; for he would need full information as to the exciting causes of the disease for which he was called on to prescribe. I remembered with relief that he was a man of sense and good feeling, as well as of professional skill.

Doctor Marsden, to whom I and all my family were well known, was greatly surprised to see me. But I was obliged to make my own personal explanations brief, that I might the more speedily explain Ralph's state and circumstances. I was spared much pain in the rehearsal, by the doctor's ready apprehension, both of facts which I could only indicate, and of feelings of my own that were wholly incapable of expression. He listened attentively; and with tender delicacy thanked me for my information, and encouraged me to hope for the best.

He remained long with his patient. When he returned

to the study I saw in his face what I had already surmised from my own observations—that Ralph's case was serious.

"Doctor," I said, fearing that he might recommend my retirement from the house in favour of some better-qualified nurse, and anxious to assert as early as possible my wish to remain ;—"I am the only person at hand who really cares for poor Mr. Thain. His father, as you know, is himself ill—and far away. His wife——"

"His wife is also from home," said Dr. Marsden, in a quiet, matter-of-fact way, "therefore?"

"Therefore I especially wish to nurse and wait on this poor dear sick man—so kind, so true, so faithful a friend as he has been to me and mine for years past! Will you then, dear doctor, under the circumstances, fully trust and employ me? Will you tell me what to do for Mr. Ralph, and rely on me to do it?"

The doctor, who was a benevolent old gentleman, with a bald head fringed with white hair extremely fine and curly, and possessing the softest hands I ever felt, patted me on the cheek and smiled.

"As I had the pleasure and the honour," he said, benignly, "of bringing little Miss Fitzadam into the world—some—let me see—some nineteen years ago: am I right? she will not resent a fatherly caress, eh? My dear child," he added in a graver tone, "the illness in the room yonder is likely, I fear, to be very serious. I wish there were other and older friends than yourself at hand; I do indeed."

"But there are none, doctor," I replied, promptly.

“Mrs. Blythe Walker, you know, would be of no use in sickness.”

This seemed to amuse Dr. Marsden. “How so Miss,” he chuckled out, “that self-possessed and experienced lady of no use? I will be bound she could shame *me* with her medical knowledge, and rule a thousand nurses at once.”

“I meant nothing disrespectful towards her doctor; but—but—please don’t send for her.”

The old man here chuckled again; presently, however, growing grave once more he seemed to consider my proposal. The end was that he promised to send a trained nurse to the house at once, and told me that I could not do better than in assisting her to carry out his directions. Adding many injunctions to me to be careful of my own health, many inquiries respecting my father’s state, and some predictions as to the probable course of Ralph’s illness, he left me for the present.

Alone again, I longed more than ever to be of service to the sick man; but until the arrival of the nurse I knew not what to be at. She came at last; and I set myself heart, mind, and body to co-operate with her in fulfilling Dr. Marsden’s instructions.

In the course of the afternoon I found time to write to my mother, announcing the painful position of the household, and Ralph’s alarming state. I also penned a few brief but tender lines to Robert, telling him the same distressing news. A third task, to which I afterwards addressed myself, was not an easy one:—I indited a note to Miss Tyndal, in which, without giving any hint as to the reason of Margaret’s absence, I spoke of Ralph’s

solitude and sickness, declaring my intention of remaining for the present under his roof. The difficulty of framing the communication lay in the fact that I clearly foresaw Miss Tyndal's entire disapproval of the course which I had resolutely determined to adopt.

CHAPTER XIII.

EFFORTS TO MINISTER TO THE SICK, AND TO BIND UP
A BROKEN HEART.

Arts profitless for wound beyond a cure.

OVID's *Metamorphoses*. (King's translation.)

THE chapter of my history upon which I now enter is one from which daylight, and common sounds, and all ordinary occupations whether of business or pleasure, are alike excluded. The faces that rise before me as I recall the period are colourless and grave; the eyes that meet mine gleam dimly out of surrounding shadow; the voices I hear are hushed and strange. As I write, Memory intensifies the scene which Will has bidden her reproduce. The sable picture deepens as I watch it—dreadful with a weird chiaroscuro such as Rembrandt could not have matched; wild with wan shapes of which Fuseli could scarcely have dreamed.

The imperfect correspondence between human intention and performance is widely known, and often enough confessed. But are not most of us apt to indulge the belief that when we are greatly in earnest the discrepancy will disappear, or at least diminish? Yet that discrepancy is

never so manifest as when our heart is in our work—although, indeed, it is probably less extensive then than at other times. Herein is a source of disappointment: it furnished me with disappointment now; for I had not long constituted myself Ralph's superintending nurse before I found that the manner in which I discharged the functions of my self-imposed office was remarkably faulty—and I had expected the reverse to be the case.

In the first place, I did not at all equal my anticipations and design in my way of meeting Miss Tyndal's foreseen objections to the course which I had resolved to pursue. My note quickly brought that lady to Mr. Thain's house; I received her in the study.

"My dear," she said, "have you taken counsel of the Lord about staying here?"

"No, Miss Tyndal," I answered.

"Then how can you remain?"

"An old and dear friend is attacked with sickness in the unfortunate absence of his wife. Providence sends me to his house at the moment of his need. I feel that I *must* stay and nurse him."

"But, my dear, Mr. Thain has, as the maids tell me, his own doctor attending upon him; a regular professional nurse also; and then his relative, Mrs. Blythe Walker, is close at hand."

"Yes. Ralph has everything, in short, but what he most needs—an affectionate personal friend."

"My dear Lucy," said Miss Tyndal, expanding her nostrils, "I fear your view of your duty is wrong; we must not be guided in such matters by providences; the

written word is the only reliable director. To the law and to the testimony! What saith the Scripture? Is it not written ‘abstain from all appearance of evil?’ Can it be the Lord’s will that we should ‘give occasion unto the enemy to speak reproachfully?’”

I answered with a decision which would have been quite as effectual, and more to my credit, had it been attended by greater suavity of manner:—

“If possible, Miss Tyndal, I shall abstain from the *reality* of evil—unkindness; and let the *appearance* take care of itself. I cannot admit that by staying here I shall be ‘giving occasion’ to anyone ‘to speak reproachfully’.”

Miss Tyndal replied by one of her “hems,” and said no more. I now began to relent, fearing that I had spoken, and carried myself, with undue forwardness and self-confidence. Without abandoning my position, I apologized for having displayed these failings. Miss Tyndal at once forgave me—for in spite of her cant she was, as I have before said, a truly good woman; but she went away thinking me quite wrong; whereas had I vindicated my views with greater patience, she might have been induced to accept them. I do not think she fully understood at this time the serious nature of Ralph’s illness.

This was a bad beginning; and in several other respects I equally fell short of my intentions. I found myself desponding when I ought to have been determined; drowsy when I should have been vigilant; and wanting in judgment when important arrangements depended upon my decision. Thus the period of my nursehood was notable

in my personal history mainly as being a period of battle with myself.

The nurse soon begged my assistance in the sick-room. In the course of the afternoon Ralph's symptoms increased in their threatening intensity. The sensibility of his ear and eye became so keen that ordinary household sounds were painful to him, and even the subdued light of the window—which was darkened by a double blind—was more than he could bear. I longed anxiously for the doctor's next visit.

Once, having muttered to himself for a long while, the patient suddenly started up in bed, and cried out loudly :—

“Lucy, Lucy! is that you? There is something for you to hear—mind that; you must not go away till it is told?”

He had spoken in this strain twice. What could his meaning be? The cause of his earnestness now seemed to pass from his mind as rapidly as it had occurred to it; for scarcely were the words uttered when the sick man laid himself down again, and immediately began to whisper and sigh confusedly, as he had done before.

Shortly after this the doctor came again; and I now heard more of Ralph's case than I had previously known. It was one of inflammatory fever, with affection of the brain. After first discovering his loss on the previous night, Ralph—perhaps in obedience to some useless impulse to seek his wife—had wandered long about the town amidst pouring rain. The exposure, combined with the agony of his mind, had induced his disorder, the rapid rise and

growth of which betokened its intense and alarming character.

As night drew on delirium supervened. It was beyond description dreadful to witness. It was the enduring realization of such hideous pictures as morbid imagination will sometimes momentarily present to a harassed and enfeebled mind; it was the dire fulfilment of the worst phantasms which affright distempered dreamers. I watched it with a horror that was intensified by my sympathy with the sufferer.

From the sick chamber I was repeatedly called to receive the condolences and answer the inquiries of the town. Mrs. Blythe Walker came in person, and assured me that "any services which it might be in her power to render, should be entirely at the disposal of the invalid." Nor did she fail throughout Ralph's illness to be, after her fashion, attentive and kind to him; at the same time, she never expressed any wish to displace me from my post as head nurse, but, on the contrary, appeared extremely desirous that I should continue to fill it. I did not know, nor could I wish to inquire, how far Mrs. Walker and others suspected the truth about poor Margaret. I continued to speak of her absence openly to everyone I saw, characterizing it merely as unfortunate. Amongst the callers Mr. Finch presented himself. It was a hearty grasp that I received from and gave to the freckled fingers; and the chirping tones of the well-remembered voice did not tend to my discouragement.

At length inquiries ceased. I found that the nurse favoured my presence in the sick room, and that there

were indeed many ways in which I could assist her there. For these reasons I resolved to be at her beck and call throughout the night—a resolution which her subsequent behaviour led me to extend and alter to the determination of myself watching by the sick man's bed. The truth was, she soon displayed a tendency to drowsiness; and at last her slumbers became prolonged and profound. I was the less pleased at this somnolency, since it was always steadily ignored by the woman when she awoke, which she did from time to time on the utterance by the invalid of any sound louder and more arresting than usual. At such moments she would exclaim,—“ Shockun, shockun! ain't it? If one had ever such a mind to drop off, there'd be no doin' of it ”—and by the time the words were uttered she would be asleep once more.

Thus it came about that I was practically alone with Ralph during a large portion of the night. Now and then I spoke to him, when he would answer and seem to recognize me for a moment; but generally he appeared unconscious of my presence. Sometimes I walked softly about the room, passing and repassing the open window, through which a sweet soothing scent of opening buds stole revivingly in. Sometimes I sat still in a shadowy corner, hopeful that the patient was genuinely sleeping, and plotting how to silence the busy mice behind the wainscot—although not without regret that it should be needful to disturb their poor little plans. Anon the nurse and I were employed together in moistening the bandages about Ralph's burning head, or in preparing and administering to him the drinks and doses prescribed by Dr. Marsden.

Once and once only during the night did I positively fall asleep, and then, as I firmly believe, but for a single minute. I woke in such alarm that I took care not to repeat the lapse. I thought that a dress belonging to poor Margaret, which hung on the open door of the dressing-room, had come down from its peg when my eyes were shut, and had been across the room to tell the shower-bath that Ralph was going to die: I thought, too, that the two stout oaken posts terminating in glossy balls, which stood at the foot of the bed, had at the same instant changed into middle-aged and bald-headed mutes, and that they had barely found time to resume their normal shape and appearance before the moment of my awakening. In my dread of a return to such horrors I ran to the extreme of wakefulness, and forthwith my mind was crowded by hosts of hurrying thoughts. I had vivid and affecting views of the powerful contrasts afforded by mortal life. I saw scenes of light, gaiety, and loveliness; heard sweet alluring waltzes, and the thrilling stir of youthful feet. Then I beheld dripping heaps of human rags gathered outside the city workhouse, and listened to the moan of want and the curse of despair. Again there rose before me bright visions of beauteous and gamesome children—rosy, romping, innocent; crammed with life and health; unconscious of a future to dread, and unburdened by a past to deplore. And then once more I was occupied with the spectacle actually before me—the spectacle of Ralph Thain, sad, forsaken, no longer young, stricken with a sore—perhaps a mortal—malady!

In the midst of the deep and various musings begotten

by these importunate ideas, I noticed that Ralph began to speak aloud with something like coherency. I was moved to find that his thoughts, though confused, were bent upon his father. I listened attentively, and these were some of his words:—

“The flowered satin stock, and the old pearl pin with a chain! Is that the best you have? It will suit you I know; but is it not a little odd and old-fashioned? His coat-collar, too, not turned down! Stay, half a minute! Stop him, good people, stop him, and turn down his coat-collar! Do it quietly and kindly. See, the boys are laughing!”

Again, after a long succession of indistinguishable sounds:—

“No, no; not he! Let all know it if you will, but the old gentleman. He must not hear: for God’s sake, for God’s sake do not tell him! Lucy, all; promise—swear he shall never know! It will break his heart—it will kill him if he hears. No, no, Lucy, promise, swear it——”

His voice had risen; the last words were almost a shriek. I ran to his side. Taking his hand and pressing his forehead, I strove to soothe and reassure him. The nurse started up, and once more said,—“Shockun, shockun! ain’t it? Any person might drop off for a minute or two, if ’twasn’t for this here.”

And now the sufferer was busy auditing Union accounts. His broken sentences powerfully sketched the scenes he saw, and gave lucid glimpses of the things that in days gone by had touched his gentle heart. He sat in the

Board-room of some Workhouse, amongst overseers and relieving officers. He heard a bell sound: it was noon: the pauper children trooped along the echoing passages to their pauper dinner. There was the thump of a small crutch amongst the small footsteps! Hush! He was praying for the poor, the unhappy, the unfriended. Then came the children's grace, sung: he blessed the singers tenderly, and went back to the accounts.

At another time my father, my mother, myself, were uppermost in his mind. And now I cried bitterly—I could no longer help it. How refined was the thoughtfulness for me and mine which the utterances of his sickness disclosed! How minute must have been his calculations for the furtherance of our relief and comfort in the days of our distress! Yes; I cried bitterly now.

He talked, too, of Margaret—his bride and his pride; of the wedding ceremony and feast. But amidst all his rambling thoughts there seemed to be stationed within his mind some dark distressing memory—a memory more ancient, and yet more vigorous than that of his forsaken state and its woful cause. To each weird strain sounded from his poor babbling lips there was an *obbligato* accompaniment, denoting the oppressive consciousness of some weary secret, or the desire—mingled with dread—to unburden himself by a revelation.

As morning drew on he became more quiet. I left his side, and watched the mysterious dawn; saw poor Margaret's newly-appointed garden gradually unfold itself in the growing light; and leaning from the window, bathed long in the refreshing early air. I was recalled to my

charge by a sudden summons, which he spoke in tones far different from those of his previous utterances.

“Lucy,” he said distinctly, “pray come to me.”

I was at his pillow before he had finished the sentence. His appearance was less alarming now than it had been ; but, if possible, sadder. His expression was more intelligent ; his colour more natural : now, too, I observed that his words were dictated only by his will :—in short, the night-clouds of delirium had for a while rolled away from his mind. But in every line of his face there was misery unutterable—in the troubled stoop of his brow, in the hollowed fall of his cheek, in the tense compression of his lips. I was amazed, horrified, at his look.

“Is *she* gone ?” he asked, pointing to the place where the nurse had sat.

I answered “yes,” for she had just left the room.

“Listen then,” he said, “listen :—Lucy ! have pity upon a poor guilty man.”

“Mr. Ralph,” I hastened to reply tenderly, “dear old friend ! It is my sole wish now to soothe and comfort you. Surely you cannot distrust me ? Poor dear Mr. Ralph ; so deeply worthy, so cruelly wronged ! ”

Here the sick man threw up his hands to his ears, as though he would shut out from them the sound of my words. Remaining in the same posture, he said loudly :—

“You know nothing. You add to my misery. It is all just and right ; all appointed and deserved. Suffering inseparably belongs to *sin* ; I believe it, at least, and I have cause to believe it.”

“Do not excite yourself,” I pleaded, little heeding the

tenor of his self-condemning remarks. He saw my lips move, and unstopped his ears.

“Do not excite yourself,” I repeated; “do not attempt to speak: it is better not.”

“Lucy,” he persisted, in spite of my protest, “did you—let me put the question plainly—did you ever, some months ago, think that I loved you?”

I trembled and turned pale. On another occasion I might have evaded or resented a question so distasteful and embarrassing. But I felt that this was no season for subterfuge or indignation. After a short pause I said quietly:—

“Mr. Ralph, to show you how entirely I trust you, I will own that I did once think—or dream—so. But listen!—I have long seen my mistake. If you really misled me, I freely forgive you; if it was all my own misapprehension, you will forgive me.”

“It was no misapprehension: I did mislead you.”

“And I forgive you from my heart.”

“Hear me! I found myself possessed of an influence; I allowed a false impression to be created; and I had an object in what I did:—such an object, Lucy, as you cannot imagine!”

Once more I remonstrated with him for exciting himself; for so great was his agitation that his whole body shook till it made a grim and dreadful rattle as he lay. My protests, however, were of no avail. He went on,—his mouth dust-dry, and his tongue clattering as though it had been of wood:—

“Such an object—such a reason! This:—I could

not then have borne life for a day but for the thought that I was dear to you. I knew the power of love—no man ever knew it better! I knew how much love will excuse, absolve, forget. I thought:—‘so long as this good true girl has within her heart some fondness for me, there is that in existence which mayhap will cover even such misery, such crime, as mine.’”

He was silent. The phrase he had just used made me start. Glancing anew at his awful face, I saw there, and I knew that I saw there, something more than misfortune and disease—something that made me shrink and tremble and inwardly cry to God for help.

He went on:—

“So I kept alive the illusion as long as possible. Base, cruel, heartless you will call me? But not wholly so; no, God knows! not quite so! I did Lucy—I do,—love you with a true friend’s love—mad contradiction as it must sound when I speak the words. I loved you as a friend; while in the thought that you loved me in a tenderer fashion was for a while my only power of endurance. That thought often saved me—shall I tell you from what?”

Deeply interested and moved at these strange confessions, I perhaps unwisely signified assent.

He bent his lips towards my ear, and in accents that made me shudder, whispered:

“From suicide! From the precipitation of the unblessed and wretched death that I foresaw I must one day die. Meanwhile the Righteous Judge of men was reserving me for completer retribution than I had power to inflict upon myself. He saved me for a more tremendous

destruction! But it is right; it is just; it is His order of things—the order that might have been learned only in blessing and happiness!”

I began to think that I was betraying my trust as a nurse in permitting such excited talk as this. I roused myself, and tried to believe that I was still witnessing only the wanderings of a fevered brain. I said firmly:—

“Ralph, you are ill: you do not know what you say. I must impose silence upon you for your own sake: we will talk no more.”

He laid his head upon the pillow, from which in the eagerness of his announcement he had lifted it; and seemed to show a willingness and desire to obey my wishes. But he could not restrain himself from speaking again.

“Lucy,” he proceeded, “I am not wandering—and you know it. I am ill indeed; I am going to die; doubtless I *have been* delirious; but just now my mind is clear. Let me drink again; and then in God’s name listen—if you have any pity.”

The poor suffering man drank eagerly. While the glass was to his lips I said:—

“Dear Mr. Ralph, I implore you to say no more. This season of sickness is no time for discussing with a fellow-creature the sins or wrongs of the past. Whisper them instead into the ear of our Merciful Saviour! To *talk* about them does not seem to belong to present duty.”

Here Ralph started up with violence, and said rapidly and loudly:

“It *does* belong to it. These by-gones are all a part of what is happening now. I must, I will speak! Lucy, you never will refuse to let me unburden my mind before I die?”

The horror under which he evidently put the question, overshadowed me as I listened. I saw distinctly that he had some fearful revelation to make. The deep reserve, the self-consciousness, the isolation of thought and of habits which had long characterized him, came into my memory, and confirmed the testimony of his present declarations. I believed that if I stayed to hear, I should learn from his lips truths that would effectually clear up much in connection with his past conduct and manner which had hitherto appeared dark and incomprehensible.

I was meditating how to answer him when footsteps sounded outside the door, and the doctor (accompanied by the nurse) came in to pay his morning visit. Thankful for this welcome interruption of a most painful scene, I took advantage of the opportunity and left the room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DREAD TRUTH DECLARED.

Conscience seeks in speech a respite from despair.—SCOTT.

LOOKING back as I now do with a full knowledge of the event, I find it difficult to determine how far, when I left Ralph's room that morning, I suspected that the disclosure which he had expressed himself as being so anxious to make, might be one intimately concerning myself. I know this much positively :—that I had been dismayed at what had already transpired, and that I wished if possible to avoid further confidences. But I remember, too, that as soon as the invalid's face was out of my sight, I became much more willing than before to attribute most of what he had said to cerebral disorder ; and that pity for his forlorn condition soon again so filled my mind as to leave but little room there for speculation upon the nature of any future confessions to which he might urge me to listen.

Mrs. Gamp's proceedings have thrown discredit upon the truth that nurses must take care of themselves, if they would take care of their patients. Nevertheless it is a truth. Being now assured of the verity by my bodily sensations, I made the best use of the time at my disposal to refresh and

recruit myself. I bathed ; took a turn in the open air ; breakfasted as heartily as I was able. The doctor remained long, and I was glad of it : his stay allowed me a generous interval for these precautions.

I was fated, too, to benefit by still less doubtful means of restoration and enlivenment. Before Doctor Marsden left, a messenger came down from the Miss Tyndals, bringing the inquiries of the ladies, and a letter from my mother : it was in the latter that I discovered an effectual instrument for my resuscitation.

How completely cheering this letter proved will be understood when I say that it informed me of a great improvement in my father's health. Mr. Thain had been with him much during the last two days ; and, as before, the companionship of this faithful and sympathizing friend had been manifestly conducive to his recovery. The brightest hopes were now entertained of a speedy and complete restoration.

Gay were the visions of happiness which arose before my mind's eye at these tidings. I saw our dear home once more occupied by its proper inmates ; the dull, isolated London life exchanged again for a merry country existence amongst many friends. I saw my mother her former cheerful self—full of her old energy—bent upon her old enterprises. I saw Queen Esther again reigning supreme over the domain which in time past she had governed so long and so well. I saw my father restored to that position of eminence which he had once uninterruptedly held in the Westford community—an eminence, by the way, which, though highly gratifying to those who

loved him, had always been less appreciated by himself than envied by some of his neighbours ! To crown all, was the prospect of spending the happy hours of preparation for my marriage in the loved spot where I had been born and bred—where Frank had lived and died ;—for well I knew that the termination of my father's painful malady would also be the termination of every scruple of mine which now inclined me to defer my wedding ; and that the “happy hours of preparation” in question would speedily ensue upon his return. Blest and bright indeed my future seemed to have become. I confess that for a short space of time I nearly forgot the dark shadow now resting upon Ralph in the contemplation of my own sunny days to come.

But it was *only* for a short space of time. I started quickly from my dream ; and realizing again the misery about me, I felt anew its weight and density. And now I earnestly recurred to the reflection that my own vast and various blessings had doubtless been heaped upon me *for a purpose*. My belief in the existence of this purpose grew firmer than ever. I knew not what was coming ; but I felt confident that the hope and joy I possessed owned close relationship to impending occurrences—a relationship which it would be alike my duty and my privilege to trace out, establish, and uphold. While I thought and felt thus, I heard Dr. Marsden's footstep approaching the study where I had been taking breakfast.

“Well Doctor,” I said, “what of the patient?”

Mr. Marsden shook his head, and was silent for a considerable time. At last he said that he wished for a second

opinion on the case; and that my mother had better be plainly informed of the existence of serious danger, in order that she might, at her discretion, pass on the alarming news to Ralph's sick father in its entirety forthwith, or break it to him in a gradual manner. With a weighty, meaning look into my eyes, Doctor Marsden added that I must expect Ralph to give increasingly distressing signs of a morbid brain and aberrant mind; and finally undertaking with great kindness both to summon the physician whom he proposed calling in, and to write the necessary communication to my mother, the genial and considerate old gentleman once more left the house.

I was debating in my mind whether or not I should do well to return to Ralph's room immediately, when the nurse came and begged my presence there, that she might be free to assist the servants below in making certain preparations which had been ordered by the doctor. This summons of course decided me; and full of a strange expectancy I went back to the sick chamber.

It was some minutes before Ralph observed me—I had entered the room in as unobtrusive a way as possible—but the moment his mind attained to a consciousness of my presence an eagerness again marked his whole manner. His look at this juncture was unspeakably touching: it signified utter weariness and suffering of body, combated by some indestructible mental longing. I could not resist the appeal of such a look; I took Ralph's hand and sat down beside him, determined now to listen to anything which it might relieve him to tell, no matter how much pain the listening might cost me.

He shook off, or tried to shake off, my hand from his ; and slowly and painfully raised himself in bed.

"Nobody else here?" he hoarsely whispered.

"No one, dear Mr. Ralph," I answered.

"Then the time is come; I hope I have enough of it left; I know I have but little. This fire is burning me to ashes; remember as you listen that Ralph Thain will soon be consumed by the flame. Lucy, did your brother Frank once love Margaret Thorne?"

I wondered at the question, and at the name by which he mentioned his wife; but I hastened to reply to the poor questioner, and said:—

"No. There was a little flirtation between them when they were children, but never anything more."

"You are right; I know it now well. But at one time I thought differently. Once I believed firmly that Frank's heart was Margaret's, and hers his. A misapprehension, a mistake; would you have thought that out of it a whole hell of sin and misery could grow?"

He paused. I gave no answer, but sat silent and trembling, gazing with increased awe and wonder at the singular and appalling spectacle of his face: a face fading and death-like, but flushed with a ghastly seeming of energy; a face at once intelligent and irrational, alert and apathetic; a face to dream of, but not to tell.

"Remember, then, what I have said," continued the sick man, throwing his right hand towards me as though to impress his words on my memory; "remember the belief I once had, and the strength of the belief. Add another truth to those you possess:—I have loved Margaret

Thorne with all my soul and mind, and might for three years past; I have loved her madly, selfishly, only."

A grim despotic thought here began to oppress my mind. It was a thought so cruelly horrible that its approach deprived my very body of its strength—shook my knees, and paralyzed my fingers. With all my power I rose up against the merciless tyrant; yet hardly could I throw off his threatened bondage. Ralph Thain proceeded:—

"Till the beginning of that time I had lived in ignorance of the great passion. Through the long years of youth, and the shortening years of mature manhood, no gust of it had crossed my soul. Then it swept over me—a tornado. Isolated, shy, proud, occupied, I had disbelieved in it until a time when others have often outlived their faith; and now fanaticism ravaged the heart which years of sceptical confidence had thrown off its guard. Love came to me in its unblessed aspect—black and fierce with jealousy, selfishness, and cruelty."

Again the dread tyrannic thought; again a desperate struggle to curtail its growing power.

But here once more the sick man's voice interrupted the conflict:—

"For listen! this is how it was. She would not hear me at first; and soon I learned why; her heart was not free. Knowing this to be true, I suffered a perverted imagination to complement my discovery with the pretence of another. Such love as mine was, is blind, credulous, suspicious to insanity. I saw only the internal processes of my own busy head, believed falsehood, and suspected

the innocent. My real opponent gave me, at first, not a moment's anxiety. He held a quiet course which did not even excite my notice, till——"

Here he broke off, sighed heavily, and for a few seconds closed his eyes.

"Where was I?" he resumed. "Yes, Lucy, my real foe escaped my distrust and my indignation; and as I live, that man—the man for whose sake Margaret Thorne refused me as her lover—is the man for whom she has been false to me as her husband! Ah! it matters not now; nothing matters but for you to know the truth before I die. With a passionate jealousy as deep as it was silent, as positive as it was misplaced, I saw my rival in an old familiar friend, in your brother, Frank Fitzadam. His lively pleasantries with his former comrade, her manifest delight in his bright companionship, alike misled and maddened me. Oh God!"

And now the thought that I had dreaded, hated, and resisted, mastered my whole soul: it became a sovereign conviction; it crushed me with its tyranny. At this moment my eye met Ralph's; not as eyes are wont to meet, but with a huge collision—a shock that threw me shivering on my knees at the bedside. In that eye of his—wild, miserable, dying, I saw confirmed the terrible persuasion of my mind.

Let the reader decide how much, if any, of the awful narrative that followed, must be ascribed to delirious raving: I have only to relate what was said, and how I heard. Ralph spoke in a low voice; sometimes the sound he made was but a murmur. His bandaged head rolled

from side to side upon the pillow throughout the recital: his white and wasted hands lay helpless by his side. Yet amidst all the suffering and weakness thus displayed, he uttered his words with a peculiar dreadful eloquence, and with a pictorial power which bade me behold whatever he described.

There clung about him, it seemed, the memory of a wild and fearful storm. He spoke of pelting rain and flooded meads; of a low brown sky; of flying boughs. He led me for a dreary walk through this rough weather. He first took me from his office through the silent, dripping streets of Westford; then, by lanes and byways to a country house, one I well knew—Soothington Court. He bade my presence at an interview between Margaret Thorne and him. I listened; and through my noisy pulses I seemed to hear her speak again: I looked, and her graceful figure and delicate face straightway appeared before me. How well I remembered these trenchant replies—sweetly cruel, fascinating while they killed! How fully I felt his disappointment at her first decisive words; his agony at her subsequent levity, at her final elegant and easy dismissal of his laborious, ungainly suit! I passed out with him into the wet: walked homewards with the rejected man. So real it all was, I could feel the great drops from the elms, and the rush of the swift wind; could see the uniting puddles of the lane, repeating underfoot, with an added chilling glare, the comfortless dun sky above. He took me by the meadow pathway leading to the weirs. I heard the growing roar of the swollen river.

And now he has brought me to the weir dam. He

pauses here, that he may unfold to me the nameless miseries which the narration costs him. But I need no such disclosure ; I can see all that he is enduring in the white dejection of his suffering face.

He calls up before me a figure which now approaches him. It is the figure of a young man, active, athletic : the face is tanned, but radiant ; the curls are glossy and coal-black ; the smile is godlike. This is my brother Frank. I watch his light steps as he nears the weirs ; I see him pause upon the dam. He is gazing downwards upon the falling foaming water that in the unwonted flood has driven its way through the bank : he is speculating, mayhap, how far the seemingly untouched footway is really trustworthy. I remember well what brings Frank out on this tempestuous day. He is going to Soothington on his well-loved friend's behalf, to further, if he can, that friend's advancement and success. Knowing that the kindness which it is in his heart to do would be neutralized if proclaimed, he has been, and intends to be, silent about a deed that has cost him much self-sacrifice ! Beaming with the beneficence of his errand, he looks up and sees before him the individual on whose behalf the errand has been undertaken.

The disappointed man meets—and misinterprets—his generous friend ; surmises his destination ; imagines him accepted where he himself has been cast off. In the next moment is an eternity of woe. Sore at heart, forsaken of God, possessed of the devil, this gentle sensitive Ralph, the man full of tenderness to all pure sweet things, the child-loving, age-revering man—lifts a sudden arm ; one,

Heaven knows, of but little muscular power, yet damned to be strong enough for its single violent purpose—lifts a cruel murderous arm against his best and truest friend ! It is done. The frank smile of friendship has no time to change to the gravity of wonder or reproach, nor the well-knit nervous form to exert its powers of self-protection. The tall shape staggers, and is lost. The resistless draught pulls down that mighty frame as though it were a straw. The fancied rival is no more.

I did not listen now to spoken words. No ; I stood and saw it all performed. When the dire climax came, I clutched the bedclothes as if to save my brother ; flung myself forwards as though to drown with him. Then, woman-like, putting my agony into sound, I gashed my lungs and wounded the air with a shrill, sharp-edged cry :—“ Help ! help ! help ! for God’s sake, help ! ”

CHAPTER XV.

POOR RALPH.

Man unblest ;
Of contradictions infinite the slave
Till his deliverance, when mercy made him
One with himself, and one with those who sleep.

WORDSWORTH.

I LAY upon a sofa in Ralph Thain's study, and the servants of the house were about me : the story which I had lately heard had thrown me into helpless hysteria.

It was the momentary triumph of human infirmity ; but I knew that there was that within my reach which would enable me to rise superior to such weakness. Most of my success in right-doing has been heralded by failure : most of the battles in which, by God's help, I have fought bravely, have seen me, at their first shock, prostrate and shuddering. It is not my way, heroine-like, to meet sudden trial calm, undaunted, and erect ; or at once to descry the path of duty through wilds upon which night has fallen. It is mine, rather, to succumb to the enemy's swift assault, and only in my humiliation to learn resistance ; to go astray amidst the gloomy desert, and then,

seeking the kindly light of heaven, at last to find the road !

So it was now. I had sunk for a while in the deep waters ; I cried to God, and lo ! the waves cast me out upon the safe dry land. I found myself suddenly possessed of a firm conviction, and a solid comfort ; the conviction that past discipline had especially prepared me for my present trial ; the comfort of believing that Heaven's means could not prove inadequate to Heaven's end.

I quickly grew calm. It was easy, and not untruthful in any view of the past revelation, to attribute my indisposition to the terrors of Ralph Thain's state. I did this ; and the domestics were soon at ease on my account. I asked to be left alone ; and for some hours I prayed and thought in solitude.

I prayed to know my duty—and ere long I clearly learned that the beginning of it consisted in—*silence*. Charity seemed to lay her hand upon my lips : I submitted my heart to her firm yet gentle gesture ; and vowed that to none—save my husband only—would I ever repeat aught of what I had heard from Ralph. The vow has been kept until now, when, as part of a disguised narrative which my undertaking did not oblige me to abjure, I reproduce the dreadful words that are essential to my history. The reader knows by this time that I believe those words to have been absolute truth ; but let him judge for himself of the correctness of the belief. To proceed with the tale :—

Thought now naturally took me back over the past ; and all the wanderings that she led me tended to increase

the conviction and the consolation of which I have spoken above, till at length my realization of present duty became complete, and my desire to fulfil it vehement. I thought first of my old liking for Ralph ; of the insight given me by means of it into the gentler and nobler traits of his character ; of the impulse which the liking had received from my strange and seemingly accidental misapprehension with respect to the letter written by Robert to my brother, but believed by me to have been written by the man of whom my young girl's head was then vaguely dreaming. To me, thus predisposed to judge him tenderly—to me and to no other—had Ralph told this frightful story of his guilt. Neither father, nor wife, nor other relative had been near his bed to listen to the tale : I alone had been at hand to hear it. Had groping chances then blindly stumbled to this conjuncture ? Surely Providence had contrived it. I remembered my late bitter sufferings on Robert's account. I considered their causes, and saw them to have been wild jealousy and wounded love — exactly those emotions which had betrayed Ralph into his great sin. *I began to think that I knew at last precisely why I had suffered so much.* Might not the misery have been permitted to visit me in order that I should learn to forgive and pity the man who, suffering similarly, had been led, against his better self, into sudden crime ? It might : nay, I firmly believed that it had been. And my reflections did not end here. I recalled the vivid, twice-repeated dream which had so strangely, and, as it then had seemed, so incongruously intruded itself amongst the occurrences of my visit to Yorkshire. It now seemed to me like a message from

Frank himself, adjuring me since in my own experience I had tasted the bitter sorrows of thwarted love, to have compassion upon the man who, under the burden of like misery, had foully and fatally fallen. It implored me, as I thought, not to let Ralph die unforgiven, uncomforted. Finally I turned the eye of my mind once again upon my own happy prospects. I thought of my doubts dispelled, of my joy confirmed, of my faith in Robert blessedly justified. And the conclusion of the whole matter was this:—I saw myself destined and chosen to assume weighty and affecting responsibilities. By my knowledge of Ralph's better nature; by my own late deep distresses; by the generous pardon which I fancied the spirit of my brother bestowing on his unhappy murderer; by my restoration to the full joy of reciprocated love—I heard myself called loudly and distinctly to smooth the dying pillow, to wipe the dying eyes of poor Ralph Thain; to judge not according to the appearance, but to judge righteous judgment; to co-operate with the All-merciful in His mercy to the self-condemned; and, forgetting a grievous and irreparable wrong, to show some farewell tenderness to the dying wrong-doer.

I had been kneeling: I rose quickly and cried:—"Oh God! help me, and I shall not fail!" I felt confidence and strength. Yet the task before me was no easy one. A yearning after my darling injured brother, a natural shrinking from the perpetrator of a frightful crime, repeatedly cooled the ardour of my pity for Ralph, and made me tremble at the thought of addressing him again. But Heaven be praised, these feelings did not

prevail against the better ones with which they contended. The aid upon which I relied was not wanting in the hour of my necessity.

Probably more time than I was aware had elapsed since my hysterical fit began. The physician, summoned by special messenger from the county town, had, as I now learned, arrived. He was holding a consultation with Dr. Marsden in the sick room, and I, of course, could not be admitted. It seemed long before any move was made. At last there was a stir, and the physician presently passed downstairs; after which Dr. Marsden came to the study and besought me not again to go into Ralph's room, thus giving me to understand that he had heard from the servants of my recent hysterics. I made no promise on the subject of his request; and assured him that I had completely recovered from my attack, and expected no renewal of it. The doctor went on to say—and he did so with a most considerate gentleness—that hope of the patient's recovery could now no longer be indulged. He left me in order that he might communicate to my mother by telegraph the sad conclusion to which the consultation had brought him.

I now learned that the services of a second professional nurse had been secured; and I trembled in my weakness lest the opportunity which I so earnestly sought for a private interview with the dying man should never be granted me. Nevertheless, on second thoughts, I resolved to watch ceaselessly for such an opportunity; remembering that He who mercifully reveals to us our duty and qualifies us to discharge it, may also be expected to create the

necessary conditions for its fulfilment. In pursuance of the resolution I made inquiries at Ralph's door every quarter of an hour; sometimes receiving a report from the nurses; sometimes taking a glimpse of the patient myself. His state was entirely different from that in which I had lately seen him. There was no excitement, no intelligible continuous speech. He appeared stupid, insensible. He muttered confusedly, or told his sufferings in a low and prolonged moan. All this seemed against me, and added to my other deeply solemn feelings an indescribably eager anxiety.

Although I was now able to be perfectly calm in my manner, yet the mental probation which I was undergoing no doubt produced its effects upon me externally. The women appeared to be struck with my aspect and bearing; and, naturally ascribing them to distress at the patient's danger, they many times offered me consolation for grief of a kind that had ceased to exist within me. "Lor' Miss," they would whisper, "now don't 'e take on so: maybe the poor gentleman 'll come round after all."

"God forbid!" I would inwardly reply.

The days and nights now seemed to fall into a chaotic jumble; I neither counted nor separated them. I received the Miss Tyndals—perhaps many times; I undressed myself and tried to sleep more than once. Robert's visit to Westford was again deferred, and in my present state of mind I could scarcely regret the deferment. No tidings of Margaret were received. The situation of affairs in London, too, rendered it impossible that any interruption

of my solitary watch over the dying Ralph should arise from thence. The effect upon old Mr. Thain of the news of his son's illness had been most serious. Although the intelligence had been considerably broken to him by my mother, it had, greatly to her distress, induced a return of his malady; and had so prostrated him, as absolutely to prevent the homeward journey, which it was now his chief longing to make. Confined to his bed, he could only communicate with Ralph by dictated letters, or by telegraphic messages of inquiry. My mother herself, whose heart I am certain must have been severely torn at this time by the various and conflicting claims upon her care and sympathy, held herself bound to remain where she was—not only that she might nurse our old friend in his renewed sickness, but also that she might be near my father, whose convalescence had now reached a point at which it appeared to be greatly furthered by her society. Ralph continued without sensibility. I waited, watched; prayed that he might be granted a short interval of reason—a recovery, ever so brief, of his powers of recognition and attention. My faith and patience might have failed me; but the remarkable concurrence of circumstances which kept all other friends from his bedside tended to sustain my confidence that my wish privately to gain his dying ear would at last be fulfilled.

It was fulfilled. One day, when the sun was low, a nurse came creeping out from the sick room to say that something like sleep had come over the patient. She held this to be a good sign; and, nurse-like, took advantage of the opportunity for a little relaxation below. I fancied that

I had heard the other woman pass downstairs before ; and knowing that Ralph should not be left alone, I went to see if he were so. He was. He lay silent and motionless, but not, I thought, asleep. Trembling and faint I sat down near him. At this moment I was painfully and profoundly conscious of my isolated and anomalous situation as the sole depositary of a dread secret—and that secret the murder of my own brother ; as a watcher beside the dying murderer, waiting to dismiss him from the world with a word of mercy ! Such consciousness, however, did but serve to quicken my eagerness for the consummation of my desire : under its influence I touched Ralph's arm, and softly pronounced his name.

In a moment his eye was open and upon me. It was a dying eye ; even closer upon death than I had supposed, but in its deathliness intelligent once more. Ralph knew me ; and he knew that I had understood the truth. His look was wonderful—words are weak to tell it :—a look of hunger for pity and pardon, of pure and deep affection, of humblest self-abhorrence, of consciousness of better things than passionate jealousy, and cruel murder.

It was all easy and natural to me now. My tears rained thickly upon Ralph's dying face. In the name of every soul whom he had wronged ; firmly, confidently, from my heart of hearts, I spoke the words of compassion and forgiveness. I felt as I had not felt before, the depth of the injury inflicted upon me and mine ; the irretrievable nature of our loss ; the unspeakable horror of the crime committed. But still more powerfully did I feel the blest privilege of being able to forgive—the bliss of mounting

above all cloudy sense of injury into that sweet and heavenly sphere where all-absorbing Mercy shines unsullied and supreme.

As I spoke a change passed upon the dying face. The faint hint of a smile trembled upon the lips; the eye was lifted heavenwards with a look from which despair had vanished. It was but a slight, a fleeting alteration of expression; yet it spoke volumes of meaning, that will be precious to me as long as life endures. It taught me that Ralph had understood my full forgiveness of his sin—my promise that his father should ever be spared the knowledge of it—my whispered direction to the One Atonement for all human crime, and to the One Resting-place for all weary human sinners. And then, while my tears still fell among his grey hair, and while I yet poured into his ear new words of peace and pity, I perceived that Ralph Thain was dead, and I alone.

Ralph was dead! Oh, the exquisite sadness of his story! A noble soul, wrecked in a single gust of passion: a nature lofty, benevolent, refined—perverted for an instant, and thenceforth a ruin! My grief for him seemed greater than I could bear.

Yet death had given him full deliverance. It had taken him for ever from the miserable consequences of his one sad fall: it had borne him back to his own better self; back to the light and glory of that virtue which, despite the darkness of his later life, he had truly loved, and for the most part steadily pursued; back to Him whose righteous chastisements he had indeed incurred, but whose tender mercies he was not too guilty finally to share As

I cherished these thoughts, something like comfort spread through my heart ; and putting my subsequent reflections into words to make the most of them, I whispered : “ And then the latest sounds he heard on earth were the tones of compassion and sympathy ; and to *me* it was mercifully given by the preparation and guidance of Heaven, to speak his pardon, and to soothe at last his great and just distress.”

I gently closed his eyes, and passed away. In the passage I met the nurses, and told them that their occupation was gone. “ Whatever will his poor lady do when she hears ? ” said the companion of my first night’s watch, “ an’ how’ll she ever forgive herself for leavin’ of him after words ? ” The discrepancy between the notions thus expressed and the actual truth was striking ; but I was glad to be able to surmise from the phrases used that scandal respecting poor Ralph and his wife had as yet taken no definite shape.

Two hours later, a firm tap at the study door aroused me from a solemn and tearful reverie. Robert’s arrival, long deferred, had at length taken place unexpectedly :—unexpectedly, but not unwelcomely ! I must have looked but a sorry little sweetheart, yet he did not appear to think me so.

“ Your mission here is fulfilled ? ” he said gently.

I could not answer.

“ It became you well, Lucy : I thank God that you undertook it.”

He did not know what the real nature of my “ mission ” had been : remembering the truth, how could I speak, or restrain my tears ?

After a long pause I said :—

“It is not all my ‘missions’ that become me, I am afraid.”

Yorkshire lay on my conscience, and I longed to be rid of the incubus.

His smile told me that he had found out all about my visit to Farsdale.

“Well, I will forgive you,” he said, folding me in his arms, and kissing my hair, and cheek, and lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LIGHT OF PERFECT SYMPATHY MODERATES THE
DARKNESS OF SAD REGRET.

I did not err, there does a sable cloud
Turn forth her silver lining on the night.—MILTON.

ONE remarkable effect wrought upon me by the events of the last few days was, that I felt as though I had been familiar with Ralph's story for years. Time has scarcely yet unravelled the entanglement of occurrences so originated in my mind ; and in writing these pages I have often found myself inclined to invest with the wild light of the revelation, scenes which were long past before that revelation reached me.

Late in the evening of Ralph's death, when I had rested on the sofa for a considerable time, and had been farther refreshed with tea, Mr. Tyndal expressed a wish to take me back to his aunts'. To quit the house was distressing—though I could scarcely have told why I found it so ; but I instantly prepared to go.

I was leaving the bedroom which I had lately occupied, when, turning towards Ralph's chamber, I saw the door open, and a female figure present itself. I was at a loss to

imagine to whom this figure could belong : it was not that of a nurse or other servant. I fancied, too, that it shrank and drew back at my appearance.

“ Robert,” I falteringly whispered as we went downstairs together, “ I have seen someone coming from Ralph’s room whom I cannot account for. I almost fancied that—that it was Margaret.”

“ You fancied rightly,” answered Robert, grave and pale. I stood still, and exclaimed in wonder :—

“ Margaret ! ”

He led me on, and quietly answered “ yes.” There was a firmness about his way of drawing me forwards, which revealed to me both his knowledge that my impulse would be to turn back, and his will that I should not do so. I silently accompanied him. His manner plainly showed me that he knew more about Margaret’s late movements than I. He gave no sign, however, of any intention to add to my information on the subject ; and holding his silence in respect, I resolved not to urge him to break it.

Little was said as we walked to Miss Tyndal’s house ; but much was thought—at least on my part. I thought how wonderfully my deepest sorrow and my highest happiness had met and mingled ; and then my mind, overleaping as they say the minds of the aged do, the nearer and gloomier facts of the past, took me back to remote and cheerful occurrences of childhood—an indefinable but comforting connection seeming to establish itself between those early joys and the blessings of the present hour.

Miss Tyndal met us in her hall. She was full of the

notion of deriving profit from the "solemn event" which had taken place. Her cap ribbons trembled with the vibrations of her anxiety to improve the occasion.

"How unspeakably sad," she said, as she loosed my cloak, "that a man so estimable, so excellent in all the relations of this present life, should have failed completely to give evidence of living faith in his Saviour!"

"My dear aunt," said Robert, "may not your language possibly be a little strong?"

Miss Tyndal raised and shook her head, looked down, and produced one of her "hems." Then she continued, not logically, indeed, but theologically:—

"Not so, my dear Bertie. Can any language be too strong to express the fearful fact that this man, blameless, absolutely without reproach among his fellow men, yet lived and died at enmity with God?"

"My dear aunt," answered Robert, in a cheerful and business-like manner, "your minute and doubtless unerring knowledge of the human heart, infinitely transcends the feeble smattering to which I have attained. I should have imagined—you will marvel at my ignorance—that to lead a blameless and virtuous life must imply some right relations with Him who is the source of virtue, although such a course need not, I grant, involve entire exemption from human frailty—perhaps of a grave kind. But it is clear I am wrong. Now under these circumstances answer me one question."

"With pleasure, my dear Bertie," said Miss Tyndal, settling herself as though to consider some weighty problem in divinity.

“My question is, then,” said Robert, with great earnestness, “will you give me some supper?”

Miss Tyndal could scarcely refrain from a smile; and that she might conceal her inclination, she immediately went to the kitchen-door to order the meal.

In the course of this short dialogue, Robert and his aunt had alike given a kind of rough estimate of poor Ralph's character. Both were equally ignorant of the precise truth concerning it; yet how much more nearly accurate, I thought, was his estimate than hers.

Seeing my deep sadness, which from time to time I could neither control nor disguise, Robert strove during the rest of the evening, with all the arts suggested by his affection, to divert and occupy my thoughts. Such efforts could scarcely be entirely unsuccessful. It was when I had retired to bed, that my grief most completely mastered me. Out of the bitter sorrow, and chill sense of isolation which followed, arose a conviction that I should be doing right to repeat to Robert, at the first opportunity, all I had heard from Ralph Thain. I saw myself permitted, nay required, to share with my betrothed husband, the burden of that secret which I now carried alone. This view of the question served to soothe and lull me again to sleep, after several sudden and terrible wakings which disturbed my slumbers in the course of the night.

Next morning I received peremptory orders to stay in bed. Miss Tyndal came to me, and enunciated these commands as her own; but I distinctly traced them to another origin, and consequently accorded to them an obedience all the more willing. Being exhausted and incapable, more-

over, I was glad of the prolonged rest; but at the same time I felt a little jealous of everybody who was up and dressed, and therefore presentable to Robert, while I was not so. I half feared that he would not remain at home; and I was accordingly much obliged to him for passing up and down-stairs a good many times during the morning, and thus declaring his continued presence in the house.

While I lay in bed a letter was brought to me. It was written in a neat legal hand, and its contents were these:—

Linnet Row, Chelsea, April, 185—.

“DEAR MISS,—

“I SEND these few lines hoping they will find you in good health as they leave me at present. Learning from your honoured mamma, miss, at the Crescent a little time back, that you was just gone down to Westford, who gave me your directions there, I thought to write and tell you of my rise and progress in life, but have been busy of a evening ever since, and not able to send a few lines before; so I write these few lines now. Through the kindness of your good words first spoken to Mr. Thain the younger of Westford, in the county of Somerset, solicitor, am now in the office of Nutt and Shell of Gray’s Inn Square; for which should wish to thank the Almighty, that shouldn’t be forgot, as being at the bottom of all things both good and bad. I send these few lines to tell you as the Universal Office went down steady and fast before I came away; for what with the quarrels of the Directors against Mr. Papillon for spending too much money upon his private

apartments upstairs at the expense of the company, and the ravages of P. P., it appears that the Office is now no more ; for yesterday, when I came by in Office hours, there was the shutters up, and two females a-looking out of the board-room windows above, which shows the ruin plain. But Honoured and Dear Miss, I got the good out of it Mr. Thain Junior wished ; for I was learned a good bit about business there, and if I hadn't gone there I should never have got into Nutt and Shell's ; but Mr. Thain the younger did me that good turn when he was in London a short time ago, which I come to the Crescent to inform you of so quick as possible. Dear Miss, am in the common-law branch at present, but if this is *common* law—which I don't mind saying to a friend—I can't think what ever Chancery and the rest of it must be ; for of all things that you can't make out the why or the wherefore of, this is as stiff as anyone could wish. But have come across one or two bits to fit into each other already ; which may lead to finding out the rest, same as big Russia used to, in the puzzle maps at Brewington Christmas tea ; but the little Netherlands and that was always awkward, what with the shapes being very near as they should be, but not quite. Please Miss give my best duty and respects to Mr. Thain the younger, who with you is the best friend I ever had or shall have ; and am sorry to hear from his clerk's letters to the firm, that he is not well. Hoping that the Almighty will soon restore him to good health,

“ Believe me, honoured Miss,

“ Your Obedient and Humble Servant,

“ ARTHUR BAYLEY.”

The oddities of this letter first seized my attention, and betrayed me into a little physical laughter, in which my heart took no part. Some languid speculations followed as to the conscience of Mr. Papillon, and the probable meaning of "the ravages of P.P." On neither matter did I arrive at any definite conclusions. It seemed doubtful whether Mr. Papillon possessed a conscience at all; and of "the ravages of P.P." I could guess nothing except that they must be entirely different from *The Contributions of Q.Q.* It must rest with future pages to show, if they can, that the question raised in my mind as to the lack, on the late manager's part, of an important psychical element, was unfounded; but I may state here with respect to the puzzling initials, that Mr. Tyndal suggested, when consulted on the point, their reference to *pleuro-pneumonia*, a then prevalent epidemic amongst cattle.

It was not long, however, before Arthur Bayley's letter began to tell upon me much more gravely. It soon served widely to re-open the floodgates of my sorrow for Ralph. His persevering kindness to the lad in whom he had thought me interested—a kindness pursued almost to the time of his death—had now become intelligible. In past days I had often wondered at it, together with many other kindred proceedings; but I saw it now as representing, in its strained eagerness, Ralph's restless desire, I will not say in any sort to *repair* the dreadful wrong which he had done to me and mine—for he must keenly have felt the impossibility of such reparation—but to cause some slight satisfaction, where he had already awakened bitter misery. His conduct with regard to Bayley had been typical of his

entire conduct since that woful day of his fall. What, I thought, must have been the agony to such a nature as his, of his long solitary endeavour to scrape together and pay to us, a poor interest for our tears; to plant about us some few pleasant shrubs, in exchange for our noble forest tree—which he had felled; and so only, all the while, to shoot inadequate loads of rubbish upon his own irreducible Slough of Despond! From the very slightness of the occasion for attention to me which my sympathy with the boy had created, Ralph's kindness to him was, perhaps, the most touching evidence that had been afforded, of a suffering solicitude on the part of the unhappy man, to mitigate or divert the sadness which he had caused.

Meditating upon these things, I grew more and more wearily oppressed. Divided between horror and pity, I now considered the various ways in which, at different times, Ralph's consciousness of guilt had affected his conduct. I thought of his sudden bursts of tenderness; of his capricious manner and talk—sometimes cruelly belying his better self; of his ambitious devotion to business; of his persevering attachment to the woman for whom he had sacrificed his peace and virtue. Only increased distress was to be derived from these reflections. I could not, however, be rid of them; and the period which had been designed to rest and refresh me after my recent anxious watchings, was spent in wearing recollections which at last became unbearable. At about twelve o'clock I hastily got up, determining forthwith to communicate my knowledge and my sorrow to Robert Tyndal.

I at once sought a private interview with him. It was

of course granted; and with white cheeks and stammering tongue I began my anomalous tale. I closely watched the listener's face. At first it appeared tenderly, soothingly incredulous; then it cooled into speculation; then it grew judicial; then it crystallized into clear conviction. Finally, it melted into softer affection than ever, and now the silence which had hitherto prevailed over Mr. Tyndal was broken, he said softly,—

“We see and know in part, Lucy; but charity never faileth: let us love, as we may, completely. A wild and dreadful story has reached our ears: we disbelieve, wonder, weigh—and fear! God help us to see our duty: has He not shown it to us already? Yes; it is surely this: to be more entirely *one* than we have yet been. Whatever may be the precise value of this startling confession—and we may never fully know its value—our exclusive partnership in the secret should unite us, as perhaps nothing else would have had so much power to do, perfectly and for ever.”

After speaking these words, Robert walked about the room for some time in silence. That the shock he had experienced was great, was evident in every line and tint of his fallen and pallid countenance; that he was well qualified to sympathize with me became touchingly clear when he next opened his lips.

“Dear Lucy,” he presently said, “I have never yet spoken much to you of my attachment to your brother. I may be open now. I loved him more than I ever loved any one—except yourself. I never suffered a heavier blow than when he was removed, except one, long ago forgotten,

that his sister dealt me. Let this show you that I am able to feel all you feel now."

What a sweet and blest solution of my trouble: to share it, and to share it equally, with Robert! How simple, how easy, was my restoration to peace; how sure was the foundation upon which my new relief was built! I leaned my head upon the bosom which was to be my resting-place through life; and meditated in wordless wonder on the full ability now granted me to sustain the burden which had lately seemed insupportable. After a while, and without attempting farther interchange of thought, we walked out together into the open air. It was fine and warm; the swallows had arrived; easterly winds were over. An exquisite incense from budding larches hallowed the breeze, and daisies were gazing adoringly upon heaven from the thickening grass. It was a time for gratitude subtly mingled with humiliation; for calm, intensified by sorrow; for faith—wider than all creeds; for thought that lay "too deep for tears."

When the first effects upon me of Ralph's story and death had thus been in a measure alleviated, it was natural that my mind should often turn itself towards London. The news of old Mr. Thain were such as to increase both my thankful feelings and my admiration for his character. His submission and patience under his crushing sorrow were striking; and his cheerful endurance of his own bodily disabilities was uninterrupted. But my mother wrote me that the sight of the feeble old man in his silent grief, was nevertheless the most affecting spectacle that she had ever been called upon to witness.

It was a comfort to me, yet at the same time a source of wonder, to remember the fact of Margaret's return to her husband's roof. What could be the explanation of her re-appearance? Was it possible that I and Ralph too had misapprehended the meaning of that terrible letter in her hand-writing which had recently so greatly shocked me? Surely not. Yet I sometimes wished that I could have the opportunity of re-reading and re-weighing the painful document. This, however, was impossible; for soon after Dr. Marsden's first visit to Ralph's house, I had myself burnt it. Such curiosity as I felt to know the truth concerning Margaret's recent movements, received no encouragement from Robert, whatever he might know. If I mentioned her name, an unusual silence fell upon him; and when I once asked him whether it would not be right for me to call and see her, he met my question with a direct and decided negative. All I now knew, therefore, respecting the gloomy house "where lay the master newly dead" was this: — that Mr. and Mrs. Thorne had arrived there, and that after the funeral had taken place, Margaret would go away thence with her parents.

Some calm days followed, for me who of late had seen so much tempest. I was young, healthy, and in love; no wonder if I recovered my nerve, and re-learnt the old habits of hope and faith. Besides, had I not, during my late trials, acquired new and most marvellous reasons for a serene reliance upon God, and for quietly enjoying the solaces of His own bestowal? With a wonder and gratitude which have never since left me, I felt—and I feel to-day—that I had indeed acquired them.

During the period of rest of which I speak, I came to love the high-shouldered tea-pot, and at least to tolerate the spiritually-minded cook. That this extension of my sympathies was in some degree owing to Robert's presence, I have no wish to dispute. His wholesome nature seemed to sweeten the close air of the Calvinistic household; in his society each member of it seemed to grow more generous, more human, than before.

He greatly added to his aunts' pleasures at this time by conceiving a grand scheme for the improvement of the garden, which, with the help of the ancient gardener, he carried out—in his shirtsleeves. It was interesting (to me at least) to observe the boundless faith and inarticulate delight which his presence inspired into the old man. A sluggish but profound joy—finding its liveliest expression in hoggish grunts or sidelong nods—would appear to permeate that singular being when Robert ordered, explained, or praised; and finding out by instinct—for I firmly believe no one ever told him—that there was an understanding between his hero and me, Mr. Stokes extended his homage to myself in the oddest manner; exhibited a sort of “welcome-little-stranger” air as nearly as possible indefinable when I approached him, and twice went so far as to leer and wink. But I may add a query whether the secret was really so well guarded, and the old man's discernment so remarkably great, as I was inclined to believe at the time.

CHAPTER XVII.

MR. PAPILLON, HIS WORDS AND WORKS.

Thou art no liar ? No,
Thou art a lie !—SHELLEY.

ONE morning Robert led me along a by-path of the garden, now thickly strewn with catkins, and with spring-snows from blossoming fruit-trees, to a certain retired summer-house, which, although a tasteless attempt at so-called “rustic” construction, consisting of knotted wood, fir-cones, bark, and moss, combined as it seemed much more for the comfort of the insect races, than for that of the human family, was by reason of its privacy, a convenient place for confidential communications. Here Robert suggested that we should seat ourselves, since, as he stated, he had something important and secret to say to me. When I had chosen a spot where spikes and knobs were fewer than elsewhere, where snail-tracks were least glossy and moist, and wood-lice only moderately lively, I sat down: whereupon Robert asked me gravely if I could guess on what subject he was going to speak. With my eye fixed anxiously upon a coarse and hairy

spider that was gradually lowering itself towards my dress, I answered hesitatingly that I had looked ever since his arrival for some statement in reference to Mary Murgatroyd, but that I did not wish to hear any unless he wished me to do so. I added that I fancied he might also propose to give me some intelligence which I did not possess, about poor Margaret Thain.

“Both persons,” he said, rather sternly, “are mixed up with most unpleasant matters. I confess, Lucy, I shall enlighten you about each unwillingly.”

“Forbear to do so then, pray. I will gladly remain in darkness for ever, Robert—if it is your pleasure I should.”

“No, no, my dear girl, it is not my pleasure. I wish to speak to you of both the—the ladies—you have named. I shall say some things that will surprise you.”

The impending spider here suddenly lowered himself into my lap, and immediately took to his heels. I cried out to Robert to catch him. Strongly sympathizing with Uncle Toby in his tolerance of the bluebottle, I find it difficult to extend my indulgence to some other insects; and amongst these I consistently include the bluebottle’s natural enemy. The spider being removed, conversation again proceeded:—

“You can scarcely tell me anything,” I said, “that will disturb or distress me—under present circumstances.”

“Indeed!” (caressing me), “and yet there was a time—it is not so very remote a time either, when persons no more voracious than I, had it in their power seriously to ‘disturb’ and ‘distress’ you by things they said—or wrote.

Were 'circumstances' greatly different then? Rather, how wonderfully some *feelings* have changed since the days of that wild visit to the North."

"They ought to have changed, Robert," I said, with a mist before my eyes.

"That impetuous, yet deliberate and Lucy-like visit," he continued teasingly.

I pressed my face against his waistcoat, but made no other answer.

"Well," he exclaimed, rousing himself, "that will do for preliminaries; now to work. Let me despatch the most disagreeable part of my business first, by referring to a piece of scandal concerning myself. The register which gave you so much uneasiness, then, practically no longer exists: its libellous statement respecting me has been virtually expunged and legally nullified by Mary Murgatroyd, who thus in act as well as in word has acknowledged its falsity. Your mother possesses documentary proof of the recantation. I now wish, Lucy, if you will allow me, to give you the singular history of the singular girl who perpetrated the singular piece of naughtiness which has at last been confessed, and so far as possible repaired."

Here Robert halted. I signified the interest I felt in the forthcoming narrative, and the eager attention with which I should listen to it. He was silent a few moments longer, and then began the following story:—

"Not very far from those desolate regions, Lucy, where a short time ago 'midst snow and ice' you solitarily wandered, is a small grey town of which you have some-

times heard me speak—a place nestling under a sheltering rock two hundred and odd feet high—a place whose stillness is as profound as its people are primitive. In a house on the borders of this town (as I have often told you before) I, your humble servant, once on a time was born. To that house of my birth, from the date of my first induction into business life, until two years ago—when a new attraction arose for me in a new quarter—I was naturally accustomed to return during my hours of holiday, for rest, and for intercourse with my kith and kin. About three years back, but somewhat later in the season than it now is, I went to spend a fortnight which I happened to be able to snatch from Government inspection, in the bosom of my family. I travelled to my home from London, and not alone. I took with me a new acquaintance, who desired to see the tarns and coves, the fells and scars of Craven, and to whom my mother, through me, had offered a few days' hospitality. He was a gentleman whom I did not then know as I know him now. The younger son of a wealthy country squire, he had been introduced to me in excellent society; and I had never seen cause to suspect that he was unworthy of the ancient and well-known family to which he belonged. He possessed an income adequate to his necessities, allowed him, as I learned, by his father; but this was not sufficient, I afterwards discovered, to withhold him from employing a great variety of means to secure to himself a more considerable independency. As the manager of various public companies which have been wound up, and as a partner in several mercantile enterprises that have failed, his name has fre-

quently come under my notice since the days of which I now speak. But I anticipate: when Mr. Cyril Papillon paid his visit to the North Riding, I neither knew nor imagined anything to his discredit.

“You start at the name? Yes; this new acquaintance of mine was no other than the man whom you once designated as an ‘aggressively uninteresting’ person. How indignant you were with me, Lucy, when you used that expression! When you have heard a little more of my tale you will be inclined to admit, I think, that the curiosity I exhibited on that occasion to discover your estimate of Mr. Papillon’s character was a pardonable curiosity. But let me return to my narrative.

“My companion made himself agreeable in my father’s house. He had travelled; he had read; he knew something of art: and of all that he had acquired he was able to speak intelligently. More than this, he possessed in large measure that gift—which let me say in passing is often over-rated—the gift of tact. He skilfully adjusted his conduct that it might fit the idiosyncrasies by which he found himself surrounded. To be brief, the self-possessed, well-looking, well-informed stranger took the fancy alike of my father, my mother, my brother, and my sisters. The intelligence of our house, in all its grades and varieties, pronounced in favour of Mr. Cyril Papillon.

“At that time there dwelt—as, indeed, there dwells now—at the lodge which stands at the entrance to my father’s comfortable but not pretentious residence, a certain widow-woman who had been a hanger-on of my family for many years. She had originally come from a manufacturing

town in the West Riding; and through circumstances with which I need not encumber my tale, she had attracted my mother's attention, and had gained the post of laundress and lodge-keeper to our establishment. Respectable and well-conducted, she had never encroached, nor misused her privileges—which were many. She was an industrious, right-minded woman, doing well what she bargained to do, and fairly earning the quiet and competency which she enjoyed. Her name was Murgatroyd; and she had a daughter—Mary.

“Lucy, your face at this moment is a most interesting study. There is a slightly troubled depression of the straight eyebrows, which tells me that you fear some revelation which may jar upon maidenly feeling. Be comforted: I will tell you no more than you ought to know; and if the tale have its coarse features no part of it shall be coarsely told. Then, there is curiosity in the upward inclination of the prettiest nose in the world. This curiosity shall be satisfied. Once more, I notice a little wrathful agitation about the parting of those very rosy lips. Are you displeased with Mrs. Murgatroyd—good soul!—or with me? I will undertake that when the story ends you shall be less displeased than pitiful, nearly all round!

“Mary Murgatroyd was then very young and very pretty. From the days of her lovely and precocious infancy the girl had been the pet of our household. She had been taught, trained, developed amongst us. All this, you will say, was grossly injudicious, if not positively wrong. I grant it; but I may say, by way of excuse for my sisters, who were the principal delinquents, that Mary's

orphanhood had appealed to their compassion before her beauty and intelligence had kindled their affection ; that the mother had showed no disposition to presume upon the kindness displayed towards the daughter ; and that the girl's privileges in our house were, to a great extent, such as had grown out of circumstances, rather than such as had been created by deliberate acts of partiality. However, the plain truth must be told, that in doing for Mary much that was to their credit and to her own advantage, my sisters had done something else for her too—something which they ought to have avoided, and by which she could not profit :—they had spoilt her. A time had just now arrived when the girl's anomalous status in our family was beginning to be owned as embarrassing. There were whispers about sending her to service ; but some insinuated that she was too delicate, too refined, too clever. It was hinted that to set a capable, well-taught, and almost lady-like girl such as she to the tasks of bed-making, floor-scrubbing, and grate-cleaning would be sheer barbarity. Nor did the objectors to the proposed plan bring forward any counter scheme of their own. Accordingly, the question of Mary's future was again allowed to drop ; and nothing was done :—an old-fashioned road out of the difficulty of not knowing what to do. The girl therefore continued to be as much in our house as ever. She read aloud to my sisters, embroidered their petticoats, cast their accounts, and attended them in their walks ; she was much in their confidence, and high in their favour.

“Mr. Papillon's short visit ended. Nothing occurred while it lasted to give me the impression that he had

especially noticed, still less that he had been dangerously influenced by, the beauty of my sister's protégée. He passed on, as I supposed, to climb the heathery fells and to angle in the stony becks of the wild district which he had travelled from London to explore. He left our house under the approbation of us all.

“Two days, however, had scarcely passed when I witnessed a scene which completely altered my opinion of Mr. Papillon. It was a fine May night: the house was close, the air without inviting; I took a walk amidst the scented coolness of the garden. If I lighted my cigar, I did so from no wish to lose the large, rosy fragrance of the peonies, nor the heavier but piquante breath of lilacs and of hawthorn; on the contrary I did so—well, from habit. Thank you, Lucy, for that squeeze of my arm: I understand it to mean that you sympathize with me in my appreciation of the different kinds of enjoyment arising from natural perfumes; and *not* that you regard my love for tobacco with unmixed complacency, although your timing of the demonstration might have been held, had I been an ungenerous man, to bear the latter interpretation. The squeeze was about four seconds too late; however, I should scorn to take advantage of such an accident.

“I lighted my cigar and strolled down a grassy shrubbery path, secluded and sinuous. Along this path lies a short cut to the lodge from the back regions of our house; and by the same route, probably some half-hour before my walk began, Mary Murgatroyd, having been kept by my sisters somewhat later than usual, had doubtless tripped homewards.

“ My steps were arrested by the sound of voices. You may recollect, perhaps, that the voice of Mary Murgatroyd is peculiar. I will not deny that I have always considered it to be one of her chief attractions. It has the high pitch and winning sweetness of a little child’s voice. At any rate it is a voice to reach the ear readily ; and it reached my ear readily and unmistakably now. The person talking with the girl was a man ; his accents were low and guarded. Not so low nor so guarded, however, as to prevent me from presently recognizing them. The tones proceeded, I soon satisfied myself, from the lips of our late visitor.

“ After thinking for a moment I saw no reason why I should turn back ; accordingly I went on. I intended to take no advantage of the couple, nor did I take any. The grassy path may to some extent have muffled my steps, and the turns in it may sometimes have concealed my figure ; but I made no secret of my approach. I came near enough to the speakers undiscovered to learn the topic of their conversation, and to catch some expressions employed. Then the alarm was taken. The girl gave a little scream and ran home ; the man, whose person I was able to identify as that of Mr. Cyril Papillon, made a ridiculously undignified dash into the bushes, out of which I am sure he must afterwards have emerged with a damaged toilet—probably no light punishment for so careful a dresser as he.

“ I finished my cigar and considered how to act. The words which I had overheard convinced me that my late guest was a cold-hearted libertine ; while my sense of right

taught me no less clearly that Mary must be protected against his advances. How was this end to be gained?

“The quietest means, I reflected, are likely to be the most effectual. I resolved not to disturb the household by publishing any scandal, not to declare the man’s fault, or needlessly to distress the girl. I simply determined to take measures that Mr. Papillon’s visit should not be repeated, and to say a private word of friendly warning to Mary Murgatroyd in her mother’s presence.

“In acting upon these resolves I was impelled by motives of which I have no reason to be ashamed:—I wished to save my sisters from disappointment, and to protect an unsophisticated girl from ruin. And here, Lucy, although I do not intend to treat my wife as my father-confessor, I will own to you that I make no pretension to exceptional freedom from error and sin. It is, nevertheless, a matter of fact that by the goodness of Heaven my conscience is free from the guilt involved in the temptation or betrayal of the innocent. To come back to the special case before us:—in reference to Mary Murgatroyd, I have been blameless in thought and act from first to last. I shall explain this, Lucy, in a manner that will less satisfy your aspirations as a moralist than your feelings as a lover. It is a simple truth that Mary Murgatroyd’s beauty although great in its way, is not of a kind that ever took my fancy.

“I completely carried out my plans. In the first place having at the expense of some trouble discovered my late friend’s quarters, I signified to him by letter that he must make up his mind to let my sisters’ protégée

alone. He replied cleverly; insinuating, — you can imagine what:—that I owned a special interest in the girl myself; and promising magnanimously no longer to stand in my way. Two good results ensued upon the correspondence:—Mr. Papillon for a time abandoned his amorous project; and my acquaintance with him was at an end. I may mention that my family remained completely ignorant both of our estrangement and of its origin.

“With respect to Mary herself I also fulfilled my intention. With many childish tears she thanked me for my intervention; and told me—what I believe to have been true, that of her own accord she had never entertained ‘a thought about the gentleman’; that he had, however, spoken to her several times before leaving our house, declaring that when his visit to us was over he should still remain in the neighbourhood on purpose to be near her; that flattered by his admiration, her head had been a little turned, but that at the same time she had been very miserable about his attentions, and was heartily glad that a continuance of them had been prevented.

“Nearly all that passed between Mary and myself took place in the presence of her mother, who acted towards her child in the entire matter with a firmness and affection greatly to her credit. I went away from home at the end of my holiday, believing that the unpleasantness which had arisen from Papillon’s gallantry had entirely come to an end.

“But affairs had taken a turn which I little suspected, and which was destined to lead on to the most startling

results. From time to time during the remainder of the year in which the occurrences that I have already mentioned had taken place, I continued to visit my home as usual. On looking back I can now see clearly that Mary's manner to me on these occasions was different from what it had been in previous days. I was indeed partially conscious of the change at the time; and I ascribed it simply to the confidences which had arisen between us in reference to Mr. Papillon.

“But I was totally mistaken. As I have since found out, Lucy, Mary's altered behaviour was attributable to another cause. This poor petted little girl—this child who, it must be confessed had, by the mistaken kindness of my family, been placed in a situation ambiguous and unsettling enough to account for any eccentricities of fancy on her part, had begun to fulfil the dubious promise of her injudicious training, by conceiving a tenderness towards—myself! The venerable Mentor (Minerva's majesty disguised) in bestowing his philosophic counsels, had, all unconsciously been shedding the mischievous darts of Cupid! It was shortly after my—what shall I call it? my *rejection*, at Beremouth, that I first obtained a knowledge of this extraordinary fact. I was talking to Mary's mother of her girl, who had just then recently disappeared from the home afforded her—as we shall hereafter see—by the relations of a man in this neighbourhood, whom she had promised to marry. In the outspoken mood induced by intense anxiety for her missing daughter, Mrs. Murgatroyd revealed to me her conviction that the girl had been smitten by her ‘young master,’ and that she

would never have wished to come to Westford at all, but for her knowledge of the fact that he frequently visited here. The avowal would not, I knew, have been made but under great excitement; and I had no reason to quarrel with the woman on account of the disclosure, since it placed me in possession of a truth which it was distinctly better that I should know. You will readily believe that the revelation astonished me greatly."

Here Robert brought his narrative to a stand, and half playfully asked me what I thought of the "wondrous tale." I answered that I cordially joined him in his astonishment; and I must confess that I added some vituperative remarks upon the character of Mary Murgatroyd. In these remarks I was checked by an uplifted hand, and a whispered "hush!" The story went on.

"Did I not once tease you, Lucy, about a female admirer of mine? I think I remember expatiating upon her beauty, devotion, and so on, do I not? I was referring to the lady in question; only—and it is a significant only—I did not then know the truth about the poor lass, or as Lucy is very well aware, I should never have made out of her vagaries the jest I did make. But let me proceed. Although much of what I shall relate has but recently become known to me, I will place the occurrences of my tale in their actual sequence.

"It was in December of the year with which I have mainly been concerned, that I first saw—my fate. From that time my visits to Yorkshire became few, my visits to Westford many. During the next six months they certainly got an inkling at home of the nature of my

attraction to the latter place. Perhaps (since one cannot, or does not, always write with prudence and caution) I may even, in letters to my good sisters, have mentioned a name—your own, Lucy; in fact there is little doubt that I did so often.

“Bear in mind now the footing which Mary Murgatroyd had obtained in my sisters’ rooms at home. Recollect her state of mind towards me; and you will scarcely be surprised at what follows. The ladies one day receive a letter from my aunts here, inquiring whether they can recommend a nice useful country lass as housemaid. It is explicitly stated in the letter that the lady for whom my aunts wish to find a servant is their old friend and neighbour Mrs. Fitzadam. The communication is read aloud in Mary’s presence; and she is asked whether, amongst her acquaintance in the town, she knows any respectable girl who might be suited to fill the vacant post. To the great astonishment of my sisters, she suddenly bursts into tears, and on her knees petitions that she may be allowed to take the place herself.

“I imagine that this unexpected request at first caused my sisters as much disappointment as surprise. But they appear to have seen on reflection that if Mary’s desire to leave them was mortifying, its indulgence might be both salutary to herself, and also—as affording them escape from a difficulty of long standing, and of daily increasing importance—beneficial to them. The end was that the girl had her wish, and went to your mother’s house strongly recommended by my sisters through the ladies here.

“The question now naturally presents itself: How far, in attaining her knowledge of my attraction to this town, had Mary employed improper means of enlightenment? I think there can be no room for doubting that she had gained much of her information in a perfectly legitimate way—that is, through the remarks openly made by my sisters in her presence. But her subsequent conduct suggests that she may have increased her acquaintance with my movements and their causes, by dishonourably reading the letters which I wrote to different members of my family.

“And now, Lucy, the history reaches a point when your own recollection will best carry it on. It is needless that I should even mention any further occurrences which took place until the day of Mary’s departure from your mother’s house. And before I proceed to consider in detail events that followed upon that departure, let me beg you in all seriousness to remember that large excuses ought to be made for the poor girl’s subsequent behaviour. As I think of her odd and powerful *penchant* towards me, I cannot help recognizing a morbid mental phenomenon too closely connected with the unwise indulgences which she had experienced in our house; and her final falsehood was but a fitting consummation of her eccentric fancy. Besides, as we shall hereafter see, *she was indebted to another person* for the suggestion of that falsehood.”

I may here state that not long after my engagement, I had written to Robert the whole history of the packet of letters with which Mary Murgatroyd had tampered during the period of her stay in our house. Thus, in prosecuting

his late investigations, he had been as fully possessed of that important link in the chain of the girl's errors, as I now was in listening to the recital of his discoveries.

Robert's last sentence stimulated my curiosity anew. I was extremely eager to know to whom Mary owed the conception of the crime which she had herself so effectively executed. Signifying to my companion my earnest desire to view her failings with becoming leniency, I listened attentively for the completion of the narrative.

But I was not destined to hear it at present. Scarcely had Mr. Tyndal resumed the story, when the voices of his aunts made themselves heard. The ladies, having just returned home from their district, had discovered our retreat, and were coming towards us.

"The Lord hath done great things for them," said the voice of the elder.

"Whereof we are glad," continued the younger.

These words may, or may not, have been designed for our hearing; by me, at least, they were but dimly caught. I naturally believed them to have reference to some family or other resident in the "district" which had just been visited; and consequently noticed them but little.

The Miss Tyndals seemed indisposed to grant us any further privacy; and thus it came to pass that the conclusion of Robert's story remained for a while untold.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DELIGHTFUL DAY LONG WATCHED FOR DAWNS AT
LAST: WHAT CONSTITUTED ITS HIGHEST DELIGHT.

To enjoy happiness is a great good ; but to be able to confer it also on
others is a greater still.—BACON.

IT probably resulted from the great shock which I had lately sustained, that whenever Mr. Tyndal remained long out of my sight I grew restless and apprehensive. At these times I suffered from unusual bodily tremors, and from a sense of guilt at my conscience, accompanied by a lurking fancy that I ought to give myself up to justice—as though the dreadful act with which Ralph's story had familiarized me were my own. It was only by the constant exertion of my will that I could keep these morbid sensations in check.

I suffered from them considerably during the afternoon of the day upon which the first part of Mary Murgatroyd's singular history had been unfolded to me. I was much alone—for Robert had business in the town, and the ladies were occupied with a Dorcas-Meeting in their dining-room. What Robert's engagements actually were he had neither revealed nor encouraged me to ask ; and this circumstance

itself augmented my uneasiness. I made many attempts that were none of them remarkable for their success to interest myself in a volume of essays, which had been specially commended by my departing lover to my attentive perusal; and in several other ways I strove—but failed—to master my disquietude.

Dusk came on; dark followed: Robert did not return. As was natural, my restlessness increased. Tea was carried to the workers, and I was asked to join them; but I declined—unwisely choosing to have my cup and platter brought to the drawing-room. I soon repented, however, of my decision; and every time that the opening of the dining-room door admitted to my ear the pipe and twitter of the ladies' voices I felt more clearly than before that I was acting wrongly in standing aloof from the good Dorcases. At last I could bear my selfish isolation no longer, and resolved to go and offer my services in the manufacture of coats and garments. For a few irresolute minutes I stood outside the dining-room door, feeling, like a Foolish Virgin, desirous, yet unqualified to enter; but no sooner had I overcome my senseless hesitation, and faced the assembly, than I became comparatively light-hearted and happy. I begged Miss Tyndal to let me help her; and she responded to my request with evident pleasure, giving me a tiny garment to work upon, which went to my heart direct, on account of its character and dimensions. There were several ladies in the room of whom I knew something; and they vouchsafed me a reception so cordial as further to touch my feelings. As soon as the meeting broke up I went to bed.

In the morning I was down early, for I looked forward to a stroll in the garden with Robert before breakfast. I had put on a new half-mourning dress: I thought that I looked well in it, and swept vainly about as though I were trailing the rich plumes of a peacock. But no Robert came to admire my skirts or me; on the contrary, the Miss Tyndals informed me that he had not been in the house all night. They allayed the anxieties which I immediately felt and expressed, by assuring me that there was not the slightest cause for alarm; adding, rather vaguely, that they had not exactly anticipated his absence, but that neither were they wholly at a loss to account for it.

The inference which I drew from these statements reasonably was, that Robert had more fully communicated his personal engagements to his aunts than to his fiancée. This I considered to be a hardship; and I concluded that it might be necessary for me, upon his return, to rebuke his reticence towards me by coolness and distance of manner on my own part.

As my lover did not come back I once more sought solace for his absence in the book which he had given me the day before; and I now happened to light upon the dedication. It was addressed, as I could not help seeing, to myself. The volume was Robert's production: it was doubtless the very work which he had written after his parting from me at Beremouth!

Is the delight which I immediately began to take in the book to be ascribed entirely to vanity? I would fain hope not; yet I fear it must be confessed that vanity had a good deal to do with my pleasure. Nevertheless, I loved

and admired these essays greatly for their intrinsic nobleness and beauty; for the manly truthfulness of their thoughts, and for the force and brightness of their language. One paper—"on waiting"—especially struck me; the dignified pathos of it was deeply affecting to my heart; and this was only right, for I had strong reason to believe that my own perverseness had created the emotion which it expressed. For many hours I gave myself up to enjoyment; wondering that I had not recognized my treasure earlier, and seeing in its bestowal a thoughtful preparation for my beguilement during these present hours of loneliness.

Evening had come again. The ladies were out: I sat reading my book in the drawing-room, a little unquiet at the discovery that I had reached the last essay. Robert's step on the gravel drive caught my ear, and a moment later he was greeting me. I found that I had quite abandoned my proposal to receive him coldly.

After some little banter had passed between us about his absence and its cause—in the course of which I learned nothing concerning either, Robert proposed that we should take a walk together. Nothing could have been more in accordance with my desire; I hastened to dress, and we started.

I was eager to hear the remainder of Mary's history, and therefore wished that our steps might take us to some secluded spot where the account might proceed uninterruptedly. I consequently suggested that we should visit Beechanger—a large and lovely wood on the outskirts of the town. This proposal, however, Robert quietly negatived;

and I soon found that he was leading me towards my own old home. I had not yet been in that direction. I had half dreaded to see the house in the light of Ralph's tale; and I had felt wholly unequal to a reception of florid compliments from its occupant Mrs. Blythe Walker. Robert presently told me plainly that he intended to take me to my birth-place. He hoped, he said, that my whole family would shortly be there again together; and it would be well, he added, for me to get over the feelings of strangeness and pain with which my re-introduction to it would now necessarily be mixed up. Our tenant too, he maintained, must be treated by me with due consideration; and he judged that on every account it was desirable for me to pay Mrs. Blythe Walker a visit in his company.

In his company I would have undertaken anything. He knew this; and I think his knowledge made him as content as my confidence made me. It was like a dream to pass Mr. Thain's office, to come upon the familiar dip in the road which lay between the back of the "King's Head" and the open space fronting our house; to see the first corner of the old building behind the budding chestnuts; and once more to exchange glances with the amiable front windows. Robert led me to the door, pulled the bell firmly, and whispered to me gravely that I must indeed be especially gracious to our tenant, since it was much to our interest to perpetuate her tenancy until we could ourselves return to displace her. I nodded obedience to this suggestion, and at the same time paid my affectionate respects to the oblique crack across the door-step, and to the giant's head rudely stained in grey lichen upon the

wall ; both of which seemed as glad to see me, as I was to see them.

“ Esther ! ” I cried the next moment, “ how came you here ? ” for she it was who opened the door.

But there were others, besides Esther, in the background. How great and how happy a surprise ! The longing of many a day and night was fulfilled ; the late fruit of patience was ripe and gathered ; the goal of panting hope attained. I gave my mother a kiss, and then flung myself into my father’s arms !

Had I been allowed definite anticipations of this meeting, much anxiety would have mingled with my joyful expectancy, much painful embarrassment might have stained the bright moment of re-union. But Robert’s thoughtful care had kept me from such uneasiness in the past ; and it as completely accomplished its end now. Brought unprepared into the presence of my recovered father, I ran to him with a rejoicing heart whose confidence was unalloyed by a single apprehension, and whose unmixed delight expressed itself—as I was afterwards told—in looks and words that were wholly unconstrained. There had been much of mystery about my father’s illness ; there was no less about his restoration. But I gave no thought to these things now : I was absorbed in happiness at the fact that he was well again. That fact was clear. The blue eye beamed with all its original quiet intelligence ; the tone of voice was natural ; the primal gentleness of manner had returned. “ My child ”—such were the re-assuring words which accompanied the renewed embraces that I had so long been obliged to do without.—

“My child, how have you been, all this dismal time? You look pale and worn! Well, we must take extra care of you from this day forward. And pray have no more fear about me: you need not; I am perfectly well now.”

But the possession of desired good cannot, in this lower world, be free from its peculiar sorrows. The blessing reached, maybe, is real, and great; as far transcending our deserts as heaven is high above the earth. But it is not, it cannot be complete. Some one is dead—who should have shared it; or enjoyment is weighted with responsibilities—on which we did not count; or desire itself has expanded—and is not satisfied! While exulting in the pleasures of this bright day, how could I fail to be conscious that their splendour was stained, their smile the smile that shines through tears? The very friend whose powerful sympathy, as it seemed, had done much, if not everything, to restore my father to health and all of us to our home, was now lying upstairs helplessly sick and irremediably bereaved. Yet meditation presently showed me in this sad fact, the promise of joy sweeter than any which even the present indulgent hour had bestowed—the joy of giving love and sympathy to one who deeply needed them, and on whom they could never be lost. And so at last I glimpsed the truth that the seeming flaws in human happiness may after all be indeed its soundest points.

I am afraid it must be confessed that for a considerable time after my arrival—with some interruptions—a great hubbub prevailed in our house. I know that I was most garrulously inclined myself; my impression is that others were not less so. I have a sort of notion, too, that Esther

twice addressed to the company in general the old nursery formula:—"silence in the pig-market!" and it was not usual for her to resort to this time-honoured injunction, except in cases of extreme noise.

But the unseemliness of our babbling soon made itself felt on all sides; and the excited meeting—which had never adjourned to any more convenient place than that wherein it had at first assembled, the hall—was broken up. My father led me away with him to pay a visit to Mr. Thain.

We found the old gentleman lying upon a sofa in his room. He looked no worse than he had done when I had last seen him; and the alacrity with which he raised himself to welcome me was surprising. He seized my hand in his usual vehement way; and, kissing me affectionately, also severely scrubbed me with his unequally shaved chin.

"Lucy, my dear!" he said, motioning me to sit down by his side, "did I not tell you we should live to see this day? Did I not say there was a bright future before you? And what, indeed, could more completely fulfil my predictions than present circumstances? Thanks to the care and consideration of my talented relative and client, Mrs. Blythe Walker, your home is—as you left it. Then you see the invalid is restored to full health, strength, spirits, appetite, sleep,—in short, all things. He describes his enjoyment of existence as being intense; and I am profoundly delighted at this very gratifying assurance. Your mother also, Lucy, is well; and, indeed—beautiful. Esther, too, appears to be in the most excellent health; so does the gifted and athletic gentleman who is doomed—no, no, my

dear, not doomed, I should say *destined, decreed, appointed*, shortly to become your—your bride. To all this we must add that we are now unquestionably at the most delightful season of the year. The trees, decked in their freshest spring plumage, are vocal with the songs of the feathered choir; and while there is everywhere melody to fascinate the eye, so is there on every side colour to enchant the ear. The weather may be described as surpassingly lovely. What more could we desire?”

The last words were nearly lost: the lips failed in uttering them. The force of Mr. Thain's self-forgetful nature could no farther go. Doubtless at that moment there rose before him a vision of what might now have been in his own home: doubtless he sorely felt the truth that he himself had lost even more than we had gained.

But he was not the man to indulge his sorrow at the expense of our happiness. A few moments sufficed to restore his composure: his voice was soon heard again, speaking in tones no less cheerful than before.

“Excuse, ladies and gentlemen,” he said, as though addressing a public meeting, “the momentary cloud that overshadows me. As I have occasionally heard it remarked before—everything is for the best; and when an inestimably advantageous tenure suddenly expires that was expected to run on for an unlimited period, *then* is the time to hold fast by the truth. Lucy, my dear, where were we?”

A look here crossed the old man's face which it grieved me to see. It was a look denoting at once the declension of mental power, and a consciousness of such declension.

It died away, however, presently, as Mr. Thain vaguely but with earnestness proceeded :—

“Lucy, my dear, would you—would you mind a brief interval of——; and would your father kindly consent to——”

Papa understood his old friend more readily than I. He at once left the room, signalling to me as he went that it was a private talk with me which Mr. Thain desired.

I knew why Ralph’s father wished to speak to me alone. I perceived, too, that there was a delicate and difficult task before me; but I felt nerved to fulfil it and thankful that it fell to my lot.

My companion said nothing for some time; but he put on his eyeglasses, and adjusted them with the usual lengthy pains, though without any apparent object. I could see by the spasms which shook the weary face that the old man’s courage was nearly overwhelmed by distress.

“Dear Mr. Thain,” I said, taking—and keeping—the large bony hand—a hand that had never moved on account of me or mine, except to perform the offices of kindly help. “You must think of me as your daughter, and trust me fully, while we talk together about poor dear Mr. Ralph.”

This opening rendered approach to the subject easy. Mr. Thain said :—

“Bless you. And you were with the dear good fellow at the last. I was not, Lucy; but you were. Bless you!”

“Mr. Thain, will it be presumptuous if I remind you for your comfort, who directed my steps to him?”

"Bless you! Presumptuous? No, no. I should dearly like to hear you say."

"Was it not *Good Providence*? or, let me (reverently) put it more strongly and personally—the God of mercy and compassion?"

"My dear, dear girl. Bless you!"

"I am so thankful for it. Oh, Mr. Thain! Ralph is at rest now. You must be comforted about him."

"Lucy, my dear; you see the handle of the bottom drawer in the chest there, don't you?—not the right hand one, the left?"

"I do."

"Would you mind looking at it for a little while? I am particularly sorry to trouble you, but I don't see how to avoid it."

I looked steadily away from the old man's face, which was what he wished me to do. He seemed to get on now with less difficulty.

"Tell me, my dear," he said, "what did Ralph speak of at last? Wait a minute before you answer.—Now."

"He spoke much, and most tenderly, of his father."

I heard a strange sound as I uttered these words. I gazed fixedly on the left handle of the bottom drawer.

"Were his bodily sufferings great? You know, Lucy, I was utterly prostrated then; bound hand and foot; feeling indeed as though every moment might be my—my next; unable to move a finger to help and ease my son. Only think! Oh Lucy! Were his pains great?"

"Not so great, the doctors said, as they sometimes

appeared to be. The remedies used soothed and relieved him."

"Bless you. What else did he speak of?"

"He lamented—as Heaven send I may myself when death is near—the sins and errors of life."

My heart beat thickly as I answered. I waited the next question with anxiety, and I felt that the colour was leaving my face.

"And how, dear child, how was it at the very end? Who was with him then? What were the thoughts presented to his mind? How far did he seem conscious?"

"I only was with him. The last words he heard, were words of tenderness and of heavenly comfort: I was privileged to speak them. The last look he gave, was one of perfect intelligence, of faith, and peace: that look was given to me."

How moving a sound here stopped me! I tried to keep the drawer-handle steadfastly in view; but it swayed, bounded, and disappeared. I could only bury my face in my handkerchief, and join my sobs to those of the old man.

He was the first to recover and speak.

"And now Lucy, my love, tell me," he said, "tell me one thing more. Can you really see and believe that this evil is for good—and that this great loss is to subserve some strange hidden gain? It will help me, my dear, to hear you say 'yes.' But mind! be candid. Can you feel confidence that in taking—in taking such a son from——; such wealth, Lucy, from oh! such poverty, the

Higher Powers have really done well—done best—for him, for me, and for all?”

My heart was thrilled with strong happiness as I noted the form of the question. To the reader is already known what cause I had for answering affirmatively. I thought of the frightful disclosures which a prolongation of poor Ralph's life might have wrought, and of the ruin which they might have occasioned; of how this gentle father's heart might have been broken, and my own home clouded with the blackness of night for ever! I considered on the other hand how, by the decree of Heaven, the record of Ralph's crime was now closed; how, by placing that record in my hands alone, and by moving me to seal it with the seal of charity, the Merciful had prevented all such misery:—in the retribution of His wrath, remembering the deliverances of His goodness.

I sank down on my knees by the old man's side, and spoke less with my lips than with my heart.

“Dear, dear Mr. Thain! if ever I believed anything in my life, I believe that there is blessing in this sorrow—blessing for Ralph, for you, for all of us. With my heart and soul and strength I believe it.”

“Bless you; bless you; bless you! But Lucy, my dear, I beseech you rise. I am happy I assure you—so pray get up. This moment, rise! I will not suffer you to kneel an instant longer!”

Sitting down, I added what farther words of affection came to my tongue—and they were many. I promised again to be a daughter to the old man; to love and cherish him in Ralph's place. I begged him to trust me

for this. And I had the delight of seeing that the conviction which I had expressed, had commended itself to his mind, and strengthened his faith; that the consolations which I was anxious to impart, had already in some measure been effectually received.

In the course of the talk that followed, we often went back to poor Ralph; and in speaking of his end I was still able to maintain the guarded position which I had previously taken up. Truth was not compromised here, either in my suppressions, or in my favourable interpretations; but even had she been sacrificed, Conscience would have justified the sacrifice, seeing that the immolation would have happened at the shrine of Mercy.

I soon found out the point from which Mr. Thain's worst anguish proceeded; and little indeed could I wonder that in such a source the most painful feelings should have their origin. It was in Margaret's treatment of Ralph that the old man's bitterest regrets were rooted. There had been no attempt to conceal from Mr. Thain that a misunderstanding between the husband and wife had separated them, and had induced Ralph's illness. Of so much, and of Margaret's subsequent return—as it had appeared in penitence—I found that the old man had learnt. But I saw that he surmised more than he had been told; and although I would not on any account have fostered the suspicions which I perceived him to entertain, I had cause too fully to believe that they were justified by fact.

But my own knowledge of Margaret's story was at this time but uncertain and imperfect. I therefore gladly

reserved all judgment on the matter until Robert should think well to tell me more of those occurrences, with which, in some way not perspicuous to me, he had become acquainted. I was glad meanwhile to remember that the astounding written announcement of Margaret's infidelity was not now in existence.

The old man's kindness of heart presently led him to make reference which was near unnerving me completely. "After all," he said, "I am only now enduring impatiently what your noble parents, my dear, bore with Christian heroism. Did not they, as I, lose their one dear son, suddenly and sadly? Yes; the parallel is complete—except with respect to the frame of mind in which the chastisement has been received."

I trembled and shrank at the comparison; but listening to what followed, I became strangely reconciled to it.

"From the moment that your son lost his father, my dear—that is—let me see—where were we?"

"From the moment of Frank's death," I suggested, brought to the verge of a paroxysm of sobbing laughter by the sad drollery of the old gentleman's mistakes.

"From that moment, Lucy—(bless you!)—my mind was strangely, fixedly bent—I will not deny that the purpose was so strong as to be extraordinary—on the endeavour to restore something of his content in life, and something of his confidence in the Higher Powers, to that magnificent but afflicted man your father. I have always noticed, my dear, that when a great effort is made, there is for some time a tremendous run of ill-luck against it. ('Run of ill-luck'—how coarse an expression! Pardon

me Lucy, pray.) So it was with my effort. Your father's intellect became overclouded; (not, my dear, as we know perfectly well, all of us, in any *ordinary* way—as it is when these distressing maladies are inherited, but in quite an *extra-ordinary* way, through the direct though gradual operation of the violent shock lately experienced). My business now was to aim at the restoration of this weakened understanding. Lucy, *why was it my business? What, I wonder, was the meaning of my strong desire?* ”

It was a singular look that the old man gave me as he put these queries. It made me anxious, and inclined me to parry the questions promptly:—

“The meaning of your desire, dear Mr. Thain, was this: that the heart from which it proceeded is the kindest heart in existence. It was your ‘business’ to contribute to my father’s recovery, because it is always your business to do good.”

“But see what happened, Lucy,” he continued, without heeding my words, “I believed I should succeed, and I did succeed. My intercourse with your father, somehow, was a benefit to him: an old fool like I, was able to help that gifted man out of his alienated state! Not all at once; for there were necessarily long intervals between my visits to London, and when I was most anxious to be busy on my errand I was least able to pursue it. But a strange day came at last. A bolt fell from heaven—with the most excellent intentions on the part of Them that threw it, I am certain—upon my old head; the same bolt, Lucy, that had fallen upon your father’s head before. I had been too ill, ever since the news of poor Ralph’s attack

had first reached me, to stir an inch from my bed. But, wonderful to say, I rose up now that Ralph was dead ! I declared that I must go once more to my friend ; defied my doctor, and went. ‘ Now,’ I said, when I saw your father, ‘ you *must* be well to-day to comfort me : *I have lost my son.*’ He has been well ever since.”

These words were literally true. As my father has more than once hinted, it was the moving sight of the gentle-hearted old man suffering under a grief similar to his own, that at last completely restored the balance of his mind so long disturbed. That horrible sense of isolation—the prime agony of mental disease—had thus been finally destroyed, and a deep unselfish pity created in its room. The dread chasm which, as the alienated mind imagines, severs its experiences from those of all other minds, had before been gradually narrowed by the manifestations of Mr. Thain’s unbounded sympathy ; now it had been completely spanned, for a reciprocal sympathy had been called forth.

Some, looking at the recovery from a physical point of view, will consider that the invalid’s reception of his old friend’s ministrations, together with the happy subsequent issue from mental misery, had been simply the proofs of improvement previously effected by medical treatment. Others may account for the change accomplished on other hypotheses in physical or mental science. Meanwhile I shall be allowed my own theory on the restoration : and indulgence, I trust, will be granted me if that theory be held extravagant. I see in my father’s remarkable recovery the fulfilment of poor Ralph’s ceaseless desire to bless the

household on which his one terrible sin had inflicted a curse. He did bless it—by his death. At the moment when he paid the penalty of his crime, he strangely won the desire of all his late suffering life! Heaven forbid that I should presume to “rush in where angels fear to tread,” and like a fool attempt to lay bare the mysterious secrets of Providence; but it is unquestionable that the end of the unhappy one whose hand had been lifted against my brother was in some wonderful way the commencement of a new era in the history of my family—an era in which my father, my mother, and myself gained a full and solid compensation for all that we had lost at Frank’s death.

It was a comfort to me to find that Mr. Thain thought himself able to join us at supper this evening. He came down to the meal according to his wish, and from his sofa exhibited a lively interest in all that passed at the table. I now ascertained — what I had guessed before — that Robert’s absence from me during the past day and night had been necessary in order that he might assist the home-party in their removal. He had been to London, and had returned with them, Mr. Thain’s condition having rendered such aid as he had been able to give indispensable. I also learned that our good old friend was to stay on with us “for the present.” It was unlikely that he would again be capable of attention to business; and until his affairs could be settled and some plan devised and executed for his permanent comfort, my parents held that he could not do better than stay where he was. Meanwhile Mrs. Blythe Walker had cheerfully transferred her person and properties to the house of her brother, where it was

probable that she might reign supreme for a long time to come.

My father's inquiries were numerous, and in their nature eminently reassuring, since they principally related to that hobby most intimately associated with his health—the farm ; which, he stated, he should conduct henceforth on principles even sounder in a financial sense than those upon which he had managed it heretofore. He confessed a doubt, however, whether the satisfactory results of the old system could be greatly exceeded by those of the new. It may be remembered that the farm had been let. It is not impossible that my mother, considering my father's long absence from his office, and the serious losses to his practice probably involved therein, reflected with some satisfaction upon the length of time which, from lack of land, was likely to elapse before his agricultural efforts could recommence on any extensive scale.

My father's references to his malady were not frequent, but when he made them, he did so exactly as he would have referred to ordinary sickness. He said that he felt no discomfort now worse than an occasional oppressive velocity of thought, which seemed to him like an effort of his mind to recover lost time. His concentrated enjoyment of existence was expressed in every line of his cheerful rubicund face ; and his complete identity with his better self of early days, was abundantly illustrated. Of the latter an agreeable example was yielded by his method of commenting upon a slight inaccuracy of speech into which my mother fell during supper. In speaking of the gentlemen of the Westford Literary, Scientific, and

Philosophical Society she used the word *individuals* when it was foreign to her intention to notice the separate unity of the members of that learned body. The slip was of a kind that was certain not to escape my father's criticism. But his criticism now assumed a most friendly character. "It is true," he observed to me, "that your mother just now used the word *individual* in an incorrect manner, but the mistake was pardonable; and I have been pleased to notice, during our present talk, many instances in which the expressions employed have been pure, and appropriate to the sense intended. The study of words is as interesting a one as can engage our attention, and its pursuit is worthy of all effort."

Mr. Thain feasted his eyes upon his recovered friend all supper-time. His disinterested goodness was not without reward even during these first hours of his bereavement. In the pleasure of those whom he loved unselfishly he more than half forgot his own pain. His eye kindled, he smiled—even laughed—many times at the discoveries perpetually recurring amongst us of new causes for reciprocal congratulation and joy.

When Robert was obliged to go I went out into the hall to wish him good-bye. He first asked me somewhat anxiously, how my private interview with Mr. Thain had passed; and it was only natural that during the remarks which followed—referring as they did more or less directly to the dreadful occurrence which Ralph had revealed to me upon his death-bed—our faces should be grave and our words whispered. But,—as he has always done since, when we have touched upon that sad topic—Robert con-

cluded the matter by reminding me that the secret, weighty as it was, need never, now that it was shared between us, be unbearably burdensome to either. From this point the talk easily travelled on to a more cheerful subject. Robert assured me that the last hindrance to our marriage had now been removed, and my last scruple silenced:—my father had joyfully granted consent to our union, expressing absolute readiness to *give me away* on any date that might be selected. Robert called upon me therefore to fix as soon as possible the wedding-day; and I promised to consider the question, avowing that I saw no reasons for further delay, except, indeed, such as might be held to exist in the recent loss which our most intimate friend had sustained.

“Now a word in confidence,” said Robert, standing with the door in his hand, “I have discovered what I am going to tell you quite accidentally.”

It is scarcely necessary to say that I was all attention immediately. He proceeded in a low tone:—

“Your ‘tenant,’ Mrs. Blythe Walker, has been occupying, all this time, *only on behalf of Mr. Thain*. Just before she came to Westford last year she lost nearly all her property; and for her sake as well as for yours, her good brother—and perhaps his son—persuaded her to come here, an arrangement she was only too glad to fall in with, I daresay. So, you see, instead of being Mr. Thain’s ‘client,’ she has been, and continues to be, his pensioner.”

“Dear Robert!” I exclaimed, “where are our obligations to this faithful friend to end?”

I could say no more, for I was deeply touched, not only

at the newly-discovered evidence of Mr. Thain's consideration for us, but at his large-hearted generosity towards Mrs. Walker, which she had so effectually misrepresented, and he so chivalrously concealed.

"Do not feel pained," continued Robert, anticipating the further progress of my thoughts, "at the pecuniary obligation which this discovery reveals. We shall find ways hereafter, I think—I will not say of *repayment*; give me credit for a thought less coarse than that word would express!—but of proving our sense of indebtedness. But on no account let Mr. Thain know, if you can possibly help it, that his kindly little fraud is seen through."

"No, no, love."

"And now, Lucy, good-bye. You must hear the end of my story about Mary very soon; it is quite necessary you should do so. What do you say to an early walk in your garden for the purpose to-morrow morning?"

"A good device for a speedy meeting! How can I dishonour your cleverness by allowing it to fail? I will come at seven o'clock. Good-bye. My love to your aunts, whom I shall go to see and thank as soon as possible. They will not wonder at my sudden disappearance?"

"No; they were prepared for it, in proof of which here is old Stokes just arriving with all your goods and chattels."

The May night was warm, and through my open window came the corn-crake's pleasant note to lull me to sleep. I was tired, and his task was easy; but sleeping and waking were now but little different:—everything wore

alike the “glory and the freshness of a dream”—with somewhat of a dream’s sadness superposed.

I woke early. The old copper-beech, blood-red in the morning sunlight, and drooping its new-born foliage as if its youthful vigour were a delicious burden, told me as soon as my eyes were opened that I was at home. I did not fail to keep my tryst; but although I was punctual to the appointed hour, my lover was in the garden before me.

CHAPTER XIX.

MR. TYNDAL LEADS ME INTO A LABYRINTH.

A mighty maze—but not without a plan.—POPE.

“If the remainder of Robert’s narrative include anything painful, it would be impossible for me to listen to it in less painful circumstances than these.”

So I said to myself as I walked beside him about the garden. The lilacs, bowed with dews, were sweet. Sweeter still was the saintly little lily—just born to its holy life in sequestered corners. The air was all joy with a baby babble of innocent martins that spread their tiny wings wide and still as if they stretched them lovingly to embrace the entire universe of God. Heaven, too, was unstained glory, as earth was unqualified delight.

After an interchange of some preliminary remarks, which were excusable in the utterance, but which may safely be said to have been without general interest, the recital was continued as follows:—

“You are able now to understand, Lucy,—albeit, by-the-by, you seem to have surmised the truth before I disclosed it—what was the exact meaning of the ebullition which took place when the poor girl Mary Murgatroyd

left your mother's service. That curious outbreak signified nothing more nor less than *jealousy*. (Pray do not include *me*, Miss Fitzadam, in the terrible circle of that wrath which I see your busy eyes are marking out: it is no fault of *mine* that Mary was enamoured of me, and jealous of you!)

“The girl had been courted while at your house, as you know, by a rough, but worthy and faithful rustic admirer. So long as she continued in service she seems to have treated her wooer cavalierly, without positively rejecting his addresses; when, however, she found that she had lost her place, her haughtiness towards her lover disappeared; she threw herself upon his affection, was received into his mother's house, and promised to marry him.

“He was infatuated. Her sudden tenderness, or the appearance of it, probably turned his head, which does not seem to have been weighted with brains to such an extent as to have rendered the operation laborious. Being thus completely in the power of his mistress, he was easily persuaded to abet her in a very naughty and spiteful attempt to alarm you. Be it observed, however, that, when Mr. George Body wrote the threatening letter on his sweetheart's behalf, he was certainly quite ignorant as to Mary's real motive for wishing him to write it, and also firmly persuaded that her dismissal had been unjust.

“And now the story becomes complicated: the villain of our drama again appears. Mr. Cyril Papillon was, at the time in question, fluttering about the town of Westford; and he chanced to see the little beauty who had but

narrowly escaped him two years before. Her unsettled and disappointed state of mind only too fully prepared her to listen to the deceits of her former admirer; and poor Mary, without even love to excuse her, threw away virtue and an honourable betrothal, and fled with Mr. Cyril Papillon to London.

“The upshot is almost too obvious to need specification. Ere long this gallant gentleman wearied of the girl’s beauty; and, indeed, it appears that, with the versatility of sentiment which distinguishes such characters, he had all the while been enamoured of a second and more distinguished enchantress. Possibly he had acted on the reflection, that he

Who can at once two passions entertain
May free himself at will from either chain.

At any rate, after a few months, Mary was completely cast aside. She travelled homewards; but her courage failed her at the thought of making known to my sisters her degraded condition. She therefore turned into one of the loneliest dales of Yorkshire, and there took lodgings in the house of a woman with whom she had some acquaintance.

“A child was born; the unhappy Mary meanwhile being allowed some paltry pittance—just sufficient to enable her to live—by her late lover.

“And now the poor girl was tempted to commit the grave wrong, Lucy, which has caused to you, to me, and to others, so much annoyance and distress. To suppose that she had all along cherished a continuous design of ven-

geance towards you would be to give her credit for much greater strength and consistency of character than she ever possessed; and to imagine that she had seriously contemplated beforehand the particular form of retaliation which she now adopted would be, I think, to charge her with a crime even worse than that of which she has been guilty. The account of the matter which she has given me, and which I see no reason to reject, is this:—The suggestion of the mischief originally emanated from Papillon himself. He had been in the habit of twitting her with her fruitless fondness for me—which he had doubtless easily discovered—and one day, resorting to an elevated variety of fun, he recommended her to punish my coolness by representing me as the father of her coming infant! Although it is certain that he would never have had a hand himself, had that been possible, in the propagation of such a story—for he is far too much a man of the world to incur any such risk—yet I fear it is not unlikely that he may have explained to Mary with great clearness that it was in her power to accomplish the falsehood at registration, if she chose. Two motives may have urged him thus to enlighten her; the grudge which he owed me for my former interference with his amorous project; and the desire that he would naturally entertain to escape the reponsibilities which would be incurred, should his own paternity be recorded in the register-book. The suggestion, little heeded by Mary at the time it was made, came back to her mind when she was actually a mother; and then, actuated perhaps more by despairing bitterness than by any worse form of malignity, she compassed the falsehood

which was as much against her own interest as it was prejudicial to an innocent man's reputation. Thus, then, there is reason at least to hope, that the lie now acted by the poor girl had been but little premeditated by her.

"The false information being given, Mary proceeded to carry home to you the injury which she had thus made ready. Since leaving your house she had communicated at intervals with a fellow-servant with whom she had been intimate there—a woman named Rivers. Through this person she had learned that you were in London; through her agency she now forwarded to your mother the certified copy of the libellous birth-entry.

"To the results produced in your home, Lucy, by the arrival of this cruel document I need not refer in detail. It is enough to remind you that, with her usual good sense, your mother made known to me boldly, fully, and at once, the blow which had fallen. In a letter, for which I respect and admire her, she peremptorily required an explanation of the affair which the certificate had brought to her knowledge. It was a pardonable error of judgment on her part—but still an error—that she had previously communicated to her daughter the distressing tidings which she had received.

"Conceive the shock which her letter caused me! I had read in books of malicious slanders and of vengeful defamation; I had heard them muttered on the stage, and quoted in courts of law. But I think I had never believed in them before as possible contingencies of my own career. I will not, however, dwell upon what I felt and thought: let me relate simply what I did:—I immediately began to

investigate the entire matter in reference to which I had been wrongfully charged.

“ My first step was to go home for the purpose of seeing Mary’s mother ; the absence of my family from our house fortunately saved me from unpleasant explanations with them. I found that Mrs. Murgatroyd knew but few details of her daughter’s fall, and that not until recently had she distinctly ascertained its occurrence. The name of the seducer had not been imparted to her. I frankly stated to her how her daughter had behaved to me ; and requested her immediately to accompany me to the place where (as I learned from her) Mary had recently gone to service, in order that, if possible, the girl might be persuaded by her mother’s influence to confess the wrong she had done. The woman was confused and overwhelmed by my announcement of new trouble ; but she readily lent herself to my plan. Before I left home with her I was greatly relieved and enlightened by the contents of a letter from poor Thain, who wrote to me to communicate the conclusions respecting Mary to which your own and his discoveries had brought him.

“ If I had felt angry with the girl on account of the calumny which she had recorded against me, I had felt a great deal more so at the thought that she had obtruded her slanderous falsehoods upon those whose good opinion I most highly valued. But no sooner did I see her than these and all other phases of my wrath underwent a complete transfiguration. She was fetched by her mother from the lonely farm-house where she now found occupation to the little village inn to which I had driven. At

my request, Mrs. Murgatroyd in bringing her had kept her ignorant of my arrival; she therefore met me unexpectedly, and was unprepared with any defence. The change in her appearance was so great and sad, as at once to effect the displacement of my indignation, and to substitute for it the sincerest pity. She was thin, worn, and pallid: in performing the rough work of the farm-house she had abandoned her niceness of attire; and a strange and settled sadness had taken possession of her once bright face.

“Directly she saw me she appeared to divine the object of my visit. She made but little effort to excuse or palliate her conduct; still less did she attempt to maintain her falsehood. It was clear that in giving the untrue information to the registrar she had neither intended nor expected to accomplish more than a passing alarm or annoyance; and it was equally clear that she now suffered serious apprehension of punishment for her misdeed. I was struck, however, with her childish inability to realize the enormity of her offence. She pouted and cried, more as it appeared from a sense of wretchedness, or from dread of retribution, than from any due appreciation of the baseness to which she had lent herself, or from regret for the injury which she had inflicted. Every now and then she amusingly betrayed her infantile character by forcing her sobs into violent and dangerous fits of coughing, as if to work upon her mother’s feelings and my own, by arousing our fears for her personal safety. If I remember rightly, the trick is one often resorted to in the nursery.

“Now, Lucy, how do you suppose I dealt with the

offender? She had committed what in the eye of the law is perjury. It was in my power, if I chose, to punish her severely. I wonder whether I acted as you would have wished?"

"No doubt you acted wisely; without either merciless harshness, or weak-minded leniency."

"I will tell you what I did: in the first place, I required, as I have before explained, that the false entry should immediately be nullified in due official form. I insisted that Mary should at once go to Farsdale, acquaint the registrar with the erroneous nature of the register, and, ascertaining from him the authorized method for correcting such a misstatement as it contained, should forthwith procure the correction to be made. This was done.

"Meanwhile I had heard at different times, partly from Mary and partly from her mother, the details of the story which I have been telling you. I had learned, too, that George Body—the sweetheart whom Mary had so considerably ill-used, was gently disposed towards her still, and that having discovered her place of abode, he was at the present time in the neighbourhood hoping yet to win back to himself the stray affections of his faithless mistress. The knowledge of these last facts enabled me to fix my final condition of pardon. I told Mary that upon her keeping her promise to this worthy and faithful lover, but not otherwise, she should receive my full forgiveness. She had perhaps already been touched by his loyalty; she now renewed her promise to him, from motives which, as *he* assured me with great emphasis, were those of affection

alone. Be this as it may, the prospect of restoration to respectable life soon seemed to act favourably upon her mind; and she was evidently grateful for my pardon, although she had previously failed in consciousness of her error. I left her in a state in which regret for the past was the more genuine because hope for the future had become possible. And what do you think I did, Lucy, in taking final leave of the young lady who had honoured me by her admiration and then chastised me for my coldness?"

"Indeed it is impossible for me to guess."

"I administered to her a kiss. Was it wrong?"

"Distinctly and wholly so," I replied.

"Give me one then now by way of pardon; or at least let me give one to you."

"Certainly not," I said distantly.

"Remember, I *need* not have confessed! You discourage candour, Lucy."

"Not at all, sir; but I discountenance impropriety. Now, proceed with your story."

"I will. I gave Mary the kiss, not in my own person, but by means of Mr. Body, who acted under my direction in the matter. In other words, at the moment of leaving the couple (I had arranged the meeting between them myself) I enjoined the honest fellow to do what the scroll in the leaden casket had directed Bassanio to do:—

Turn you where your lady is
And claim her with a loving kiss.

I intended the salute to be a sign of reconciliation between us all. Mr. Body obeyed me—not without alacrity. Are you content now?"

“Yes dear Robert,” (with much suavity.)

“I breathe freely. But I must hasten on. At my advice Mr. Body now determined to turn his steps homewards, while Mary, also guided by my recommendation, resolved to remain at her place of service until her marriage. Poor Body had been sadly and recklessly wasting his little substance during his misery on Mary’s account; but his restored hope seemed to bring back to him something like resolution to renew a diligent and prudent attention to business.

“The time had now more than arrived for me to meet you at this town; I was eager to get here without a day’s needless delay. I therefore started south as soon as possible, and had travelled as far as that great northern junction where passengers for Liverpool leave the main thoroughfare between London and Newcastle, when I stumbled upon a most unexpected cause of farther detention. At the junction I speak of some delay of my train occurred; and, leaving my carriage to walk about for a while, I encountered George Body, who proved to be a fellow-passenger of mine, bound, like myself, for Westford. The good countryman joined me as I walked; surprising the bystanders, but not displeasing me, by the loudness of his friendly observations, and the breadth of his Somersetshire brogue. In the course of his explanations with Mary he had heard of your engagement to me, and of the real cause of your visit to the North; and the rude consideration which he showed in mentioning your name, the honest regret with which he deplored having annoyed you by the anonymous letter, and the reserve of

humiliation which he revealed on account of his sweetheart's late behaviour, impressed me favourably, and rendered his homely talk interesting. Nor were his remarks the less entertaining because they disclosed the existence within his capacious bosom of a flickering flame of jealousy in reference to myself.

“While we waited two trains came in from the South by different routes. By the first of these there arrived a dignified and graceful lady, closely veiled, and to all appearance anxious and expectant. Haunted by that useless but busy spirit of criticism which besets the human intellect at a railway station, I resolutely separated and weighed what I held to be the beauties and blemishes of this lady's appearance, and the balance of my conclusions told largely in her favour.

“The second train came in. The lady did not uncover her face, but she looked eagerly about, with an air, as I thought, of inward agitation mastered by a firm will. Ere long I saw that her eye had lighted upon the object it sought. The giant yeoman, George Body, had remained at my side, although while I had been busied in computing the lady's qualities, his remarks—if he had offered any—must have been overlooked by me, or answered without thought. A sudden exclamation from his lips, threatening and violent, recalled my attention to him; and when I looked at his face, it had gathered an expression of such concentrated ferocity as I never remember to have seen on any other human countenance. At the same moment the man threw his great frame forward, as though to menace or assault some newly-discovered foe.

“ A gentleman was advancing towards the lady whom I have described. His eye was fixed upon her ; he did not therefore observe me. His hand was extended towards her with an easy and confident gaiety ; hers towards him with stiffness and reserve. A word of greeting, tender and lover-like, escaped from his lips and travelled to my ear : she uttered no sound in reply. At this instant the huge shape of George Body was interposed between the two ; in a second more I knew why, for I had identified the gentleman against whom his threats were directed. I realized that the honest suitor of Mary Murgatroyd had at last confronted his rival and adversary, Cyril Papillon, with whose features the photograph had no doubt rendered him perfectly familiar.

“ The wrath of Body was terrible to witness. Shouting out furious words of challenge and disdain, he charged his slim antagonist with the sin against Mary Murgatroyd ; and heaping taunt upon taunt, accused him at random of being about to add another victim to the number of those whom he had already sacrificed to his passions. Papillon had behaved with some show of breed and spirit. He had stood his ground firmly, and had remained as calm in face and manner as Lord Chesterfield himself could have done under the circumstances. His aristocratic nostril may have been slightly more dilated than usual, and his eye a trifle less propitious ; but with these exceptions, he had so far successfully upheld that general appearance of suave serenity the maintenance of which would seem to have been the prime effort of his existence. The reference to the lady whom he had just met, however,

overtaken his composure, and let his temper loose. He dealt his opponent a smart and telling blow—after which it may justly be declared of him that physical cowardice is not among his faults.

“The result was rapid and revolting. Against so mighty an adversary as Mr. George Body, Mr. Cyril Papillon had no chance of contending successfully. Moreover, the fury and vengeance of months were gathered into the hammer-like blows which now fell upon the seducer’s face; and the arm which must always have prevailed over opposition such as that of Mr. Papillon, was additionally nerved by a sense of wrong and a desire for justice. I interposed to check the chastisement, but in vain. In a few moments the execution done upon the libertine’s handsome countenance was terrible—sickening.

“The punishment was complete almost before a crowd had had time to collect. As the police came up to prevent the violence that had as usual been consummated before their arrival, my attention was directed to the lady whose meeting with Cyril Papillon had been interrupted. She had stood silent and motionless at the beginning of the fray; no feminine scream or cry had she uttered, no gesture deprecating the encounter had she made. But now, in view of the hideous event of the conflict, she fainted and fell.

“I caught her in my arms; and, asking air from the thronging multitude about us, I unfastened her veil, and strove to revive her. Lucy, you already guess what I have to relate respecting the woman thus strangely thrown

upon my protection: she was no other than your old friend and companion, Margaret Thain.

“But one interpretation of those words which Papillon had addressed to her, and which I had overheard, was rational. How can I describe the reluctance and regret with which I saw this? How can I express the earnestness with which, as I bathed the delicate woman’s temples, I sought and sought again for some solution of her situation less humiliating than that thus forced upon my acceptance? A hundred times I strove to discover that the coldness which had marked her manner towards Papillon might justify some pleasanter conclusion; a hundred times I was driven back to the acknowledgment that a married lady who will suffer herself to be accosted by any other than her husband in the manner in which Mrs. Thain had suffered Papillon to accost her must already in some serious way have declined from virtue. In short, the hope I had hitherto indulged that your friend’s flight from home (which you had described to me by letter) might have been the result of mere misunderstanding was destroyed; nor could I doubt that she had indeed left her husband for the sake of Mr. Papillon.”

It was not strange that at this point Robert should pause in his tale to see what effect it was producing upon me. I was mystified. My sorrow for Margaret had already been largely mixed with wonder: now that I was told for whom she had sacrificed herself, my wonder was almost incredulity. The story was altogether inexplicable. My whole nature revolted against tidings so transcendently strange. Yet as I looked back over the past I could not

fail to trace in bygone occurrences painful suggestions of the event now made known to me. I could not help recalling the party at Westford Court long ago, and the passages which had taken place on that occasion between my lovely friend and the self-possessed gentleman who had absorbed so much of her attention, who had personated her lover in the charade, and had distinguished himself as her partner in the waltz. And now, to add to my present bewilderment, my ancient speculations as to Margaret's motive for marrying Ralph were revived. Robert probably saw the helpless wonderment under which I was labouring, and feeling himself, most likely, quite unable to relieve it, he simply resumed his story.

"I have seldom," he continued, "been more unnerved and perplexed than I was at the moment when I found out who it was that I held in my arms. My most prominent feeling at first—but not my best—was one of annoyance at being brought into contact with another case of shameful secession from domestic virtue. I was inclined to believe that Fate had used me rather too ill in mixing me up with a *second* scandal of this kind. I soon decided, however, to accept the unwelcome responsibilities thrust upon me, and to do my duty to the best of my power. I gave it out that the sick lady was known to me, ordered a carriage, and placing her in the charge of a waiting-woman from the station, directed that she should be taken to a neighbouring hotel. To that hotel I immediately followed her. She remained insensible for a considerable time; and having enlisted the sympathies of the landlady on her behalf, and procured for her the best medical

advice attainable, I prepared to take up my own quarters in the house as her protector.

“Some hours of awkward suspense for me followed. Mrs. Thain’s fainting fits repeatedly returned, and the medical man hinted that it might prove impossible to remove her for several days. Meanwhile I could not, of course, obtain any interview with her, so as to consult her wishes about communicating with her friends. Her bodily illness, however, gave me an excellent pretext for sending a telegram to her parents on my own responsibility. Knowing as I did from you that Ralph Thain’s state was one in which he could take no step towards his wife’s recovery, it struck me that *they* were the persons whom I should acquaint with her situation. But the message which I sent to them did not for a long while reach its destination; for they were from home, and their servants seem to have had no notion that the telegram should have been immediately forwarded.

“Thus the relief for which I looked did not arrive; while my continued expectation of Mrs. Thain’s friends prevented me from forming new plans. I was in the midst of the perplexity attached to this suspense when I heard the final result of the combat at the railway station.

“The punishment inflicted by Body had been, as I have already stated, severe in the extreme; and the speedy completeness of the discomfiture had alone prevented the victor from pushing victory to a dangerous point. With both eyes closed; with a battered—and therefore extremely plebeian—nose; with half a dozen awkward vacancies

where pearly teeth should have firmly stood ; above all, with a couple (at least) of disgraceful intrigues upon his conscience, what course had been open to the vanquished rake ? Resistance had been rendered hopeless ; an appeal to the law would have necessitated such an exposé as might not have been endured ; the wretched seducer had only been able to throw himself upon the charity of bystanders, and to seek some retreat wherein to hide his shame and recover his senses. He had been taken to a public-house situated near the scene of his defeat ; and in that refined place of retirement I must leave him.

“ In the afternoon of the day following that on which I had telegraphed to the Thornes I sent a similar despatch to my aunt, asking news of Thain, and of you. The scraps which you had last written from the house of sickness had, in consequence of my movements, failed to reach me ; I was anxious on your account as well as embarrassed on my own. My aunt’s answer did not arrive till late in the evening. It told me that Thain’s life was despaired of, and that Lucy was well. I now determined that Mrs. Thain should immediately be roused and informed of her husband’s dangerous state ; also, that she should be made aware of my nearness and of my willingness to conduct her home. Giving special instructions to her attendants, I entrusted them with a note for her setting forth these facts.

“ I did not wait long for a response. As I still sat thinking at the writing-table from which I had despatched the note, a woman’s figure glided into the room. I rose, watched, waited : it was not my part to speak.

“ ‘I shall go by the first morning train,’ said a low, firm, and slightly harsh yet not discordant voice.

“ I bowed. The whole frame shook with agitation ; the face was marble white. These tokens gave me insight into the woman’s suffering. I desired to speak to her with the greatest gentleness ; and I believe I did so.

“ ‘ Mrs. Thain,’ I said, ‘ I ask leave to accompany you. You are not well ; you need protection. Let me give it.’

“ To my surprise she came suddenly forward, took my hand, and said :—

“ ‘ You are a good man, let us go.’

“ But when morning arrived, Mrs. Thain was too ill to leave her bed. The day advanced—she grew but little better. It was not till afternoon that I found myself sitting opposite to her in the railway-carriage.

“ Not a word was spoken between us throughout the journey. Sometimes I saw that tears were dropping behind her veil. Once there was an hysterical outburst of noisy weeping ; but for the most part the bearing of my companion was one of calmness.

“ Before night she and I reached her husband’s roof. We reached it to learn that her repentance—if indeed she did repent—had come too late for reparation, for that the husband whom she had wronged was dead.”

Here Robert ceased his astonishing and melancholy story. Many and various were the trains of thought which it started in my mind ; and, from Robert’s pre-occupied face, I judged that its rehearsal had produced a similiar result upon him. Our cogitations continued for a

long time ; but they were at last pleasingly disturbed by the arrival of my father, who came out into the garden inquiring about the seedling fuchsias—just as though all the dreary interval which had passed since, amidst his growing indisposition, he had lost his interest in them, had been a mere painless blank, “a sleep and a forgetting.”

CHAPTER XX.

TWO LETTERS AND TWO OPINIONS. THINGS NOT ALWAYS
WHAT THEY SEEM.

Truth is this to me, and that to thee.—TENNYSON.

No. I.—*Lucy Fitzadam to Margaret Thain.*

[OF this, which cost me considerable time and some anxiety to write, I happen to have kept a copy ; not from any wish to remember, still less to quote its contents, but from the fact of my desire to express myself therein with especial delicacy and tenderness, whereby I was led to write a draft first ; which draft by an accident found its way into my desk (instead of the fire) and was there unexpectedly discovered by me in looking for aids to the production of this history.]

“ Westford, June, 185—.

“ MY DEAREST MARGARET,—

“ I AM very happy, and I cannot help writing to you : I always loved you much more than you thought ; and you know that happy times are times when dear friends seem dearer than ever. In my present circumstances it would be difficult indeed—nearly impossible—for me to be silent to you.

“It will comfort you to know that dear old Mr. Thain is calm in mind, and without bodily suffering except such as results from weakness. He is here, and is likely to remain here, where we do our best to soothe his sorrow and cheer his spirits, as well as to sustain, and if possible improve, his physical strength. He has spoken of you to me twice with great kindness, referring gratefully to your gentle care of him during his illness.

“I am going to be married next month. My own desire was, considering our dear friend’s loss and his presence in our house, to put off the wedding for a while longer. But he, with his usual self-forgetfulness, particularly requested that there might be no delay. I believe he is really the happier for knowing that Robert’s wishes will not be disappointed; so I have not thought it necessary to insist on deferment.

“Let me hear from you before the wedding-day, dear Margaret, I pray you: it is to be the tenth of July. Pour out your soul to your old friend: she has a larger heart and wider sympathies (she trusts) than she once had.

“And now, will you, that I may the better say something which I greatly wish to say, bear with me if I trouble you for a short time by recounting some experiences of my own?

“You once knew me as a rigid little sacramentalist in faith; in practice as an uncompromising ascetic. I got into a strange state then. Like some queer bats that I once saw in a zoological collection, I hung myself up (so to speak) by a single determined claw, wrapped my life in a tough and ugly sort of waterproof, and with a wizen face

watched the world upside down. Conscious of something seriously awry within me, I strove to rectify the fault by violence.

“That passed. I took a lesson next from the Calvinists. In a whirlwind of sudden conviction I learned that the root of my felt deformity struck deeper than I had dreamed, deeper than to be reached by such means of eradication as I had lately tried. The God now disclosed to me was greater than the God of my mediævalism ; but greater only because more righteous and unapproachable. I saw indeed a path of access to Him, and believed that some were treading it ; but I felt it to be one which I could not reach. For a weary interval the cheerless effort to find this path made up my existence.

“Then came a third lesson ; not from priest or preacher this time, but from Providence. Sorrow and change fell upon me ; I learned to submit and to endure. The hideous deity of the Calvinist gradually faded from my sight ; for in my distress I saw and *felt* another and a dearer God. With this new discovery some joy visited me. My confidence and happiness increased, as I increasingly perceived through the occurrences of my life the tokens of interposing benignity. Gradually but surely the mists of fear and suspicion which former beliefs had brought me, were cleared away from my mind : and all that had ever really blessed me ; all the sweet happiness of childhood ; all the enjoyment of beauty which later years had given ; all love of truth, and effort to know and tell it ; all natural affection ; all power of intellect ; all refining sorrow and ennobling joy ; all good of every kind, material and spiritual,—came

at last to be traced undoubtingly to this dear God whom, free from the trammels of the narrower creeds, I had learned to love and worship:—the God “not far from every one of us;” not shut off from any by the chasm of some forbidding system; but above, through, in us all; the “soul of our souls, and safeguard of the world.” And each of my late experiences of life has tended marvellously to confirm this larger and happier faith: by a series of occurrences too sacred to specify here, and too remarkable to be recalled without wondering awe, I have *known* and *felt* it true.

“But you will wonder why I am covering sheets with such a tale as this. Read on one minute longer, and you shall know. Through all the vicissitudes of feeling which I have been attempting to represent I never failed to find help and solace in the dignified worship and catholic Christianity of the old Church of England. It astonishes me now to remember how she had a word of hope for my ear, a suggestion of prayer for my lip, in the moments at which the varieties of my sadness and perplexity were at their wildest. By the reiterated tenderness of her sympathy with the penitent she tacitly rebuked the pharisaic self-sufficiency, without discouraging the conscientious effort, of my first religious hours; by the breadth and humility of her petitions she animated even a self-condemned reprobate of Calvinist faith to pray. Whatever was sound and beautiful in each phase of belief she owned and fostered; whatever was morbid and ugly she silently passed by. I could never have grown happy except under teaching so tolerant, and a system so little systematic

as hers. I find that she, and she only, of all the churches is at one with the free and happy faith which has lately blessed me. My dear Margaret, the Romanist and the Dissenter alike sneer at her as a 'compromise.' They are right in their definition, and only wrong in their derision. She *is* a compromise; but therein lies her chief glory and her brightest hope.

"They tell me, dear Margaret, that you are about to join the Church of Rome; and, as you have guessed ere now, I have written this letter with the object (amongst others) of dissuading you from the step, by assuring you from experience that the comfort and help you need are to be found in our own communion. I sympathize with you deeply, and know much more of the unquiet you feel, than you are likely to suppose. I am sure you are seeking rest in a wrong quarter: God keep you from a fatal error! I have gone through countless sorrows of self-reproach, of resultless aspiration, of perplexed faith; but the kindly, moderate Church of England has always been my comforter. May she always be yours!

"Dear Margaret, as I close, remembering that there is much concerning you that I cannot, dare not, write or speak of, I seem to want new words in which to describe—for this I might and would do if I could—the deep and special fondness of my heart towards you. But, after all, words would help me but little here, even if they were invented for the purpose: believe in your true friend's love without them. Your old playmate—

"LUCY."

No. II.—Margaret Thain to Lucy Fitzadam.

[This letter was without date ; but it was written, as I knew, from a watering place on the Yorkshire coast, and it reached me the day before my marriage.]

“DEAREST LITTLE CALM LUCY,—

“I HAVE tried a very great many times to write to you without succeeding: this may find its way to the post, but I am not at all sure:—it is at least as likely to be destroyed. I will begin it though; it will make me think of you—little fair grey-eyed (or perhaps blue-eyed) girl, always to be trusted—and that will do me good.

“No doubt you took great pains to write the advice that your letter was nearly full of. Thank you for it, but I cannot follow it, I assure you. The ‘Church of England’ was never the same to me that it seems to have been to you. In utter misery I found that I wanted something a little different from such a ‘compromise.’ Your admonition, in fact, came too late, for I had joined the Catholic Church before it arrived; but do not let this distress you, for your arguments would never have kept me from carrying out my intention, even if I had had the opportunity of weighing them for twenty years. You remember the wonderful hard-working little priest Mr. Pontifex? He long ago joined the *real* ‘Church of England.’ I met with him here, and he it was who received me into the Catholic communion. Some few years hence such dreadful ‘perversions’ will be much more common than they are now, I think.

“ I see your pure but inquisitive eyes as you read this. They are searching for tokens of shame, contrition, humility. They need search no more, really. All that you could wish has been felt, and an infinity more than you could wish endured. If you could look into my heart, you rigid little Puritan—you were essentially Puritan even in your mock Puseyism, and are no less so I daresay in your later nondescript belief—you would see a quivering bundle of countless fibres, each one of which has, I will venture to say, recently vibrated with an agony as exquisite as the sternest morality could desire.

“ As I shall of course never be allowed to see you again, and shall therefore never have to quail under your pitying glances, I think I can manage to write down for you to read (and for no one else excepting Mr. Tyndal) some of the causes which led to the result that you doubtless think (and properly enough) so shocking and unpardonable. It will be a little satisfaction to me to show you that you have never dreamed the truth. Darling little thing! I do not mean to be unkind. Forgive any words of mine that may seem so ; I must write in my way, or not at all.

“ I was never deceived, to begin with, for a single moment, about my putative ‘lover’ Mr. Papillon. I understood his faults, sins, crimes—what you will—a thousand times better than you or most others. And yet, in spite of this understanding, I really liked him very much at one time.

“ It was, I believe, on the very day of your poor Frank’s death, that Ralph Thain first proposed to me : I

refused him point-blank, for I was not fond of him, and I *was* fond of some one else. But Ralph was not a man to submit to such a reversal of his plans : he repeated his offer in the spring. This time I treated him with greater gentleness than before ; my expectations in another quarter had not been fulfilled ; besides, I was half-attracted by the earnestness of his appeal. I determined to leave the question open ; to gain time, and use it in consideration.

“ At this juncture I needed advice, and ought, I dare say, to have asked it of my mother. But I was always inclined—too much inclined—to be self-dependent in a good many matters in which taking counsel may be of use. My mother’s deafness, too, placed a barrier between her and me which I scarcely ever had the resolution to break through on any question of sentiment.

“ The suspense into which I had brought myself was closed in a hurry. Piqued one day at the indecisive behaviour of the man whom alone I then really cared for, I came to a sudden resolve to accept Ralph Thain. I knew him the worthier and truer suitor ; and I said to myself, ‘ Reason and Will shall gain the day ; Feeling must give way.’ I can be strong and decisive *in act* at least.

“ I carried out this determination, and promised to marry Ralph Thain. My father opposed the match—just, perhaps, what was needed to make me cling tightly to my intention. He had looked for something ‘ better’ for me. I told him in a pet that if I did not marry Ralph Thain, I would marry no one else. My humour was to sacrifice feeling ; and I would not be thwarted even in that

forced, unnatural whim. He came round at last, having, I think, an inkling that my decision had some desirable antagonism to an affection which he would have been especially sorry to see upon the increase—for he had always held Mr. Papillon in abhorrence.

“I nerved myself—it was a pitiful business—to go through with what I had begun. I resolved to be a good wife to Ralph Thain. I really strove to do him justice and make him happy. He was my slave: I knew it; but I do not think I ever took unworthy advantage of his devotion. I persuaded myself that by marrying him I had shaken off all other vain fancies. I thought I had taken a courageous right step, and that by so doing I had deserved and attained a happy release from previous uncertainties of feeling. Take notice, my motives in marrying were unimpeachable, according to a very common notion of morality: I wished to behave kindly to a worthy man who loved me vastly better than I deserved, and to escape from another worrying and undesirable inclination for ever.

“I had not altogether miscalculated; but then in the carrying-out of my plans I was only successful partially. I *did* shake off my old weakness for an undeserving admirer; but, on the other hand, I soon found that my husband, in his exorbitant fondness, was bent on exacting from me something that I could not give him. I could and would be dutiful, kind, obedient; but when he saw me only this, he grew petulant, reproachful, and fierce. He wanted much more, and I had nothing more to bestow. I began to see the sin and blunder of having married without that one thing which can justify marriage.

“ But my break-down was not unstriven against; although I have always disliked efforts, I made an effort to prevent unpleasantness between my husband and me. At the sight of my coolness his pride often arose, and he would stand aloof from me for days in bitterness and anger; or would bury himself deeply in business, in an attempt to show himself possessed of resources sufficient to make up for my deficiencies. I tried to bring him through these fits into a more reasonable disposition towards me. But my perseverance in the endeavour only the more irritated him, and furthered our estrangement. At length I grew wrathful myself, resolving to let the impracticable man alone. Had I not a grievance? Was I not willing to do my part to the best of my power, and did he not return my attempts in this direction by senseless requisitions upon something that I did not possess? You well know, Lucy, how such a hardship as this of mine will appear to swell and solidify when it is being measured and weighed the whole day long. I considered my grievance, till it seemed to grow to an enormous bulk, and to gather a most ponderous substance.

“ All this came about very soon after the marriage: things were so when the ineffable Mr. Papillon—who ever since my engagement had often consulted Ralph on business—began to visit our house. I thought—perhaps erroneously—that he was encouraged to do so; I thought that my husband, who had plainly detected my old weakness, willingly placed me in a position of —; but never mind what I thought; I am not sure that I think it now.

“ Alternately tender and violent, suppliant and dic-

tatorial, Ralph lived a life of suspicion and misery. I often renewed my attempts to establish between us a sensible understanding; but I failed, Lucy, I failed. We drifted farther and farther apart. He taught me—or my imperfections taught me—to hate and loathe my life with him to a degree of hatred and loathing that your amiable spirit would never be able to reach.

“I have said frankly that at one time I cared for Mr. Cyril Papillon. I declare that I did *not* care for him now; and when at last I understood—for in course of time I gathered wit to understand—what form his designs in our house were taking, any remnant of regard which may have lingered in my mind towards him, was extinguished. The change in my feeling was immense: there is no one I dislike so much as the person I once liked and have ceased to like.

“But my existence grew more and more wretched and hopeless; beyond endurance I was tempted; condemn the cruel dissimulation that followed, from your heart—as of course you will, and rightly—but try to imagine also (you cannot know) the extent of my unhappiness and my remorse. Picture to yourself the interminable jealousy of so sensitive a man as my husband—the ceaseless varieties of form that it took—the unbearable tax that it laid upon temper, patience, spirits, all healthy forces, bodily and mental too; then you will learn to extenuate the guilt which attaches to my morbid and wicked retaliation. I determined at last to avenge my wrongs by torturing the torturer with a pretence of the very infidelity which his mendacious suspicions suggested as being possible. I resolved

to separate from him, and to sting and humble him by inducing him to believe that I had left his care to place myself under the protection of my former favourite. Yes, this is the plain truth. I can cast no kind of gloss upon my intention, or give my conduct any reputable title: I acted an ugly falsehood, that I might at once escape a bondage which had become intolerable to me, and chastise the fond tyrant who had imposed the bondage.

“I lent myself to designs which had been prepared by Mr. Papillon. If he was so stupid as not to find out the truth of my feeling towards him, his baseness (apart from my own necessity) was my sufficient excuse for not enlightening him. And I protest that I never really compromised myself by word or look. I passively allowed the plot to prepare, and feigned acquiescence in its detestable provisions.

“A meeting was appointed for a certain day. I could not even wait for the specified time; but left the home which had grown so odious to me beforehand. I went away alone, and stayed in a solitude of great wretchedness till the period assigned for the intended tryst—if such a name may be given to that which I had resolved should be a startling burlesque upon a lovers’ meeting.

“While I waited for the occasion, ostensibly to confer myself upon Mr. Papillon, but really to confound him, my feelings went through a thousand changes; yet, on the whole, they softened towards my husband. I did not quite forget now that Ralph’s love for me was the root of all his mistrust and intolerance. I remembered numberless proofs, yielded by his words and behaviour, of the

vehemence of his fondness; and I nearly repented that I had left him. But still more did I find my indignation against the man whom I had pretended to favour extend and deepen. I had scarcely given ear, in reality, to his odious schemes at any time. I had barely caught the outline of some plan for flight to the Levant, where, with me for his guiding star and guardian angel, Mr. Papillon was to make a fortune out of valonea. The audacious iniquity of his project—the offensive details of which now revisited my mind, additionally to embitter it against him—inspired me with an ever increasing desire to defy and defeat the accomplished and merciless sinner.

“Dearest little Lucy, how I hate to write all this! yet I wish you to know the truth, and I shall try to go on. With the object I have stated I kept to my original plan, and determined to meet my enemy as my lover. I have always been fairly self-reliant—more particularly perhaps in dealing with men; and I did not shrink from an encounter with this most pitiful man! I had communicated with him since leaving my home; but I had taken care not to let him know my address. Signifying my adherence to the project up to the latest day, I prepared myself for the coming scene by nursing my convictions as to the real character of the man whom I purposed to thwart and abash. The time came. My errand had become more and more disgusting to me, but my will to fulfil it had grown stronger too. I kept my ‘lover’s’ appointment with punctuality and self-assurance.

“You, of course, have heard what followed. It was all taken out of my hands. A retribution which had no

reference to his intended wrong to me fell upon the gallant Mr. Papillon at the very moment of our meeting. A physical punishment, hideous and efficacious, even beyond my wish, prevented the administration of that humiliation which I had intended to inflict myself by moral means.

“But no more of this—too much is written already. Only remember, Lucy, that where you have thought me guilty, there I am perfectly blameless. You almost doubted—deny it you cannot!—whether it was right to notice me any more, even in a letter. You wrote as an act of charity to a poor ruined young woman! I well understand your significant silences, your protestations of special tenderness! Well, the young woman is no more ruined than you are. She made a frightful mistake; she could not endure its consequences; and to escape them she committed a cruel wrong. But she is untainted with the sin which has made her the object of your Christian compassion—absolutely untainted as you are yourself!

“Am I writing unkindly again? So I fear. My dear, dear little Lucy, my life is spoiled of its happiness; and I cannot help being bitter sometimes. Be thankful that love, with you, is a thing that may feasibly be indulged; and bear with those whose affections have been crossed from first to last by persons, and times, and events, in cruel and resistless alliance. I talked to you once about dispensing with love as a false and empty pretence; it is only right for me to confess that my attempt to dispense with it has brought me into my present trouble—one that would be insupportable but for the consolations of Catholic truth.

"Let your husband hear all this, but not see these sheets. I longed to tell him one fragment of the truth as I travelled opposite him that afternoon; but the explanation seemed too vast to enter upon. Let him know that I am not an unchaste woman, whatever I am; and know it certainly yourself. I care little what others think. I always knew that the world would charge me with infidelity to my husband. I dared the scandal—nay, I fostered it myself; and I deserve to suffer.

"That dearest generous old man! Can it be that I have really brought all this distress upon him by my act? If I had thought of him more I should have been able to endure better. I would have gone a thousand miles to ease or console him; and yet, when I had most need to study his comfort, I most completely overlooked it. Say a gentle word to him in my name—but ah me! I remember I am not in a position to ask even that.

"As to the sin which I have really fallen into, that is confessed, and absolved. Dearest little old-fashioned darling, in spite of all you say, it is very very comforting to be authoritatively forgiven.

"Yours,

"MARGARET."

A strange communication this; yet in one respect cheering indeed. Margaret's error was great, and its results distressing beyond words; but how pleasant to know that the one dark stain which had *seemed* to sully

her character did not truly rest upon it! Her perverseness had led her fearfully astray; but passion had not spotted her soul with the ruinous mark that is indelible!

I could not help drawing from my friend's singular revelations with respect to Ralph new perceptions of the inseparability—I was near saying the *identity*—of wrongdoing and retribution. Clearly indeed could I now see how Ralph's sin had been one with his chastisement; how the jealous passion which he had suffered to master him for evil had itself proved the punishment of the evil:—for, while surmising that Margaret's picture of the wretched life in her husband's house was somewhat over-coloured, I could not doubt the truth of her representation as a whole.

I talked long with Robert about my friend after receiving her letter; and he told me that reading what he had last seen of her in the light of her explanation, he now understood much in her conduct which he had before been unable to comprehend. It was the eve of our wedding; and we both felt that it would add a special gleam of brightness to the coming dawn to open our eyes upon it in the remembrance that Margaret was not what we had lately feared.

That sweet but drowsy eve of our wedding! They were decorating the hall with evergreens and flowers; for there, where Frank had once lain dead, the wedding feast was to be celebrated. Nobody probably forgot the awful associations of the room; but nobody was likely to object to their displacement by others less terrible. Miss Fenning, who, at my particular request, had been invited to our house for the marriage, took a prominent part in the

arrangement of the decorations. Her curls had lost none of their pristine gloss; her bonnets were as floral as ever; and her skirts were exactly of those dimensions prescribed by the fashion of the day; so that her residence in the family of the Calvinist Divine could not be supposed to have suggested to her mind any discrepancy between her creed and her adornments. She had acquired, moreover, an additional airiness and juvenility of bearing which was so strongly marked as apparently to need some special explanation. Ere long this explanation was forthcoming. It was whispered into my astonished ear that Miss Fenning was going to be married to the father of her young charges, the Reverend John Knox of Beremouth! In announcing this piece of news to the reader I am bound to profess my belief that Mr. Knox had not lost one jot of his exalted spirituality; and that, before engaging himself to his children's governess, he had thoroughly investigated the state of her soul, and distinctly ascertained her to be a child of God.

Sweet, hot drowsy evening! It is linked in my mind with lime-blossom perfume; with the slight flashing of summer lightning; with the drone of beetles; with the packing of a huge trunk with dresses a great deal too good for me to wear, but nevertheless destined for my wearing. It presents itself, too, as having been productive in my bosom of the oddest jumble of commingled feelings:—of importance; of gratitude to God and man; of wonder, regret, dread, satisfaction; of nameless shrinking, of invincible boldness; of inability to wait for the morning, of longing to defer it.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE SOUND OF WEDDING BELLS.

What a world of happiness
 Their harmony foretells !

EDGAR ALLAN POE.

THE morning came; and I awoke before a single film of smoke had arisen between my window and the old church spire. At first I feigned to myself to be incredulous that the day had arrived, even apathetic about the impending occurrence; and drew under the clothes again with a pretence of every-day disinclination to rise. But this did not last long. I was soon sitting erect, staring with most exceptional intentness at a wholly exceptional object—my bridal wreath; or, perhaps, I should rather say at the kaleidoscope patterns of my own thoughts. How many symmetrical forms, what beautiful colours, I saw !

After a while—was it long or short?—Esther came into the room, and began to assist somebody, whom I afterwards saw good reason for believing to have been myself, although I felt uncertain on the point at the time, to dress. Her aid was needed; for not only was I repeatedly visited by that phenomenon of the toilet the total and

unaccountable loss of some essential article of costume, but I suffered under a dream-like inability to concentrate my attention for any length of time upon the particular matter in hand. The old woman talked more than usual : I think I can reproduce a few of her words.

“He’ve a-watched an’ a-waited for ’e, Lucy, so patient as a kett out a-mousin’. There, he’ve a-ketched of ’e at last ; an’ he do deserve it, *he* do.”

Again, entering after a short absence with a tray in her hand :

“Now then, this here comes next, Lucy. Eat an’ drink a bit to drive a mossel o’ colour up into yer cheeks : the parsons don’t want to marry no ghostises ; an’ don’t ’e let parson Finch have all the sprackness to hisself ; you beünt goin’ to a funeral, a’ter aal.”

Once more, in reply to a question as to what was going on down stairs :

“Why, there’s the ole man a-lookin’ so merry as ’ud make ’e wish to get married every day, to keep ’n so—(Esther referred to Mr. Thain) ; an’ dressed beautiful an’ neat too—wi’s hair brushed over the right side, thenk Them Above ! An’ there’s missis that fidgetty to come up to ’e, as I were boun’ to tell her she shouldn’t do it till you was dressed. Master, he’s gone out o’ doors to let hisself off. An’ Miss Fennin’ she’s a-skippin’ about in a dressin’-gownd, through not wishin’ to spile her new silk afore church—she do love her gownds full so well as they do deserve. An’ she don’t look so pretty nor yet so young as she do intend ; but there ! that ooman do know sometimes how to ketch up a dropped stitch (when she

ain't a-preachin' too fast to mind it) so what her looks is don't signify so much. An' she've a-done a main few jobs as was wanted since she come this here time. It do draw out the best of any ooman when she've a-got a sweet-heart, let 'n be who a will."

At last my dressing was finished, and Esther bade me look at myself in the glass. I must own that I had done this already; but not to such an extent as to make me unwilling to do it again. I could not conceal from myself that I appeared to advantage; but I reminded Vanity that this was entirely owing to the richness and delicacy of my attire.

My mother now came to me, and but for her anxiety that my habiliments should not be crumpled, there would no doubt have been a great exhibition of feeling between us. Such an exhibition would not have added to the calm or comfort of either:—whence it follows that respect for appearances did us both valuable service. And, unless I am much mistaken, respect for appearances often performs similar good turns for mankind, notwithstanding that it is commonly credited with achievements of a baser sort.

I was not to be allowed to go downstairs until the carriages should arrive. I therefore sat still upon a species of throne temporarily erected for me in the middle of my bedroom. Esther insulated me thereon almost as carefully as though she had been intending to fill me with electricity; and nothing was suffered to approach my "candid vestments" which was not a proved non-conductor of dust and dirt. The interval that now elapsed before any farther move took place seemed long. Esther did not cease to act sentinel over me, nor my mother to hover around at a somewhat

wider distance ; and servants and others came to peep at me from time to time through the half-open door.

At length there was a rumble, a stir, a summons. For a moment I forgot myself, and flinging my arms round my old nurse's neck, cried out that this happiness would never have come about but for her, and that I was an ungrateful, self-willed child to her in return for all her wise and patient care. She silenced me peremptorily by pretending that my veil was irretrievably injured ; and then added quietly in reply to my last words :—" No, no, you beänt, not you ; but you be a mixtur', Lucy, same as the rest of us." I now went rustling and trembling downstairs, and presently found myself in a carriage by my father's side.

There was no lack of eyes to see me to church. The sunny streets were lined with watchers ; Mr. Fribbins scanned me through his glass door ; the landlord of the " King's Head,"—attended by a galaxy of stout and splendid, but (even in the distance) unpleasant, commercial travellers, examined me intently ; and housemaids took foreshortened views of me from upper windows. Even ancient Mr. Mundy, like a pale-painted effigy of Time, stood motionless in the market-place — as usual with uncovered head and slippered feet—to consider me as I passed.

When I alighted at the church door, my feet did not seem so well adapted for purposes of support as usual ; my father, however, allowed me to eke out my deficient strength with his, and leaning on his arm I passed down the aisle in safety.

The sight of Robert acted upon me at once as a

stimulant and as a tonic. With his high stature, his set and hardy frame, his healthful complexion, and his completely self-possessed bearing, he looked, I thought, the perfection of a man; and while I can imagine that these characteristics operated upon my nature in an exceptional manner, I am certain that no one present was quite insensible to their power. As Robert and I stood side by side to be married, the sun streamed down upon us through Frank's memorial window. Our hands were joined in rosy light; and golden links were flung about us both from heaven.

And what did I possess to bestow upon this worthy husband of mine in return for his great and patient love towards me? Had I in traversing my nineteen and a half years, gathered any treasures mental or moral with which I might enrich and bless him? Alas! too few. Yet something, I hoped, experience had given me which once had not been mine: some true desire and steady purpose to "wear away" the "vain asperities" of youth, to widen narrow views, and shrink from all harsh judgments; some increased abhorrence of sin, as the infringement of a code perfectly benevolent and beautiful—some added tenderness for every human sinner; some right resolve to be patient in desire—believing that the slow, sure efficacy of Nature (that is, of Providence) will accomplish for waiting workers all that is really desirable; some clearer faith in faith; some deeper love of love; some firmer effort after constancy in duty, and thankfulness of spirit! Earnestly and with tears I besought Heaven that these gifts, too seldom, indeed, and too slightly mine, might henceforth belong to me entirely

and for ever; that so I might justify the choice of the good and large-hearted man with whom from this day forwards I was to share existence.

Mr. Thain was the first person to kiss me in the vestry, and he did so with much gaiety. His mourning dress for poor Ralph did not look so gloomy as his good old face appeared bright. The prospect of the wedding had, it seemed, by raising his spirits, improved his health; hence he was able to be among us without serious discomfort.

And now broke out the wildly cheersome marriage-music of the belfry. How its lusty clangour spoke the tumultuous delight of my heart! And the more fully did it represent my feeling, since somehow and somewhere there lurked among the noisy merriment a pensive undertone exactly answering to one which I found amidst the melody within me: a tone telling the incompleteness of the fullest human joys; telling that their value, after all, lies in their power to suggest a vaster blessedness, as yet far off—a blessedness not to be reached, perhaps, till cycles more of years shall have run their course; till weighty lessons now unspelt by our infant species shall by Divine assistance have been perfectly mastered, and securely stored in the adult human soul; till a million million lives' experience of suffering and faith shall have prepared the advancing race to witness a gradual elucidation of all dark things, and shall at last have fitted mankind to view and enjoy that splendid consummation, of which the brightest present delight is but a faint and distant reflex. Be that soberer tone for ever in my ears!

I do not know that my wedding-feast was materially

unlike other wedding-feasts. The speech-makers grew as pale, employed expressions as round about, as usual ; and the listeners were no less afraid to look up than is generally the case. The Vicar, finding his tongue most readily, broke down in his remarks most completely ; while Robert passed the ordeal of returning thanks for himself and me only by adopting a style of address that was extremely formal and ceremonious. The Miss Tyndals were present : so were their nieces, Robert's sisters. The latter liked everybody, and let everybody see it ; the former disapproved of Mr. Finch—for evangelical reasons—and did not entirely conceal their disapproval. My mother looked excited and handsome ; my father grave, but happy. Dear old Mr. Thain was silent ; but I had never seen his benevolent face appear less sad.

I felt deeply unworthy of the whole thing—of the exquisite flowers—the costly wines—the splendid cake—my noble husband. I was relieved when the feast was at an end, and when I went up with my mother and Esther to kiss, cry, and dress in brown silk.

Farewells were nearly over, I was in the act of stepping into the carriage that was to start me on my bridal trip, when at the summit of a mighty human figure which I found standing close beside me at the gate, I saw a pair of dazed and honest round eyes loudly asking for my recognition and favour. To such an appeal I had neither power nor will to offer resistance. “Is that you, Mr. Body?” I said, glad of a diversion from the choky thoughts of which my mind was full. “You have come to give me your good wishes ? I accept them gladly.”

“That’s about it ma’am,” said Mr. Body—who, I believe, in addition to other causes for self-gratulation found himself possessed of a peculiarly solid joy in the knowledge that the idol of poor Mary’s misplaced affection was now finally disposed of in matrimony—“Bein’ that sprack as a twink, and that light as a tisty-tosty myzself, I be zoort o’ vit to give good wishes to they as mus’ be sprackish an lightish too.”

“So all is right now between you and Mary?”

“Jest about,” said Mr. Body, with such a vigorous twitch of his whole frame as quite startled me.

“I told you I hoped we might meet one day under pleasant circumstances for both of us. The hope is fulfilled. Let us be thankful, Mr. Body.”

At this moment some very singular and bewildering convulsions of the countryman’s countenance took place. They found their consummation at last. The water rushed to Mr. Body’s eyes; and out from his pocket flew a huge blue cotton handkerchief spotted with white—by the aid of which capacious representative of the species of article that is so indispensable to man in his passage through this vale of tears, Mr. Body quickly dried some of the most creditable moisture that ever glistened upon his tanned cheek. Such tears as his, reader, may you and I be blessed to shed often before we finally lay aside our pocket-handkerchiefs; tears, not of foolish self-pity, or vain regret, or angry disappointment; but of heart-felt thanksgiving for blessings undeserved, of consciousness that we might and should have borne our trials better than we have done, of silent resolve that

our future life shall not be all ingratitude! I am not far wrong, I feel satisfied, in my interpretation of Mr. Body's weeping.

Only four words more could he manage to utter. I was now in the carriage, and he leaned over it to speak them.

"Polly asks pardon, ma'am," he said.

"Polly has it—from my heart," I answered.

We drove off. For a while my feelings overcame me, and I noticed nothing; but as I grew calm I found myself passing with my husband along sweet and bowery lanes, where the silence of the summer afternoon was broken only by the sound of our rapid wheels, and by the hum of the happy bees that sang us a gentle epithalamium from their festal board among the blooming lime-trees.

George Body married Mary Murgatroyd; but his circumstances had suffered so considerably during those months of his mental distress on her account, that he found himself unable to pursue his farming operations in this country. He therefore sold off his stock and emigrated. In this move he was aided—to the extent of a moderate loan and much counsel—by old Mr. Mundy, who, being theoretically anxious about the redundant population of these realms, and practically disposed to pack people off to Australia whenever occasion might offer, took a

strong interest in the brawny rustic's project. Mr. Body's mother accompanied her son and his wife to Melbourne. To Mary, on her departure, my husband's sisters were nobly, and, I may add, self-denyingly generous; and, taught by experience, they now took care that their aid should be judiciously as well as liberally bestowed.

Mr. Cyril Papillon did not carry out the voluntary self-expatriation which he had at one time planned; but pecuniary embarrassments compelled him ere long to leave the country, for his father, who had always extricated him from such difficulties before, declined to do so again. If report speak truth, he is not so likely as formerly to impress susceptible woman-kind with his personal charms; for he carries about with him, they say, ugly and indelible traces of the chastisement inflicted upon him by Mr. George Body.

Mr. Thain is, and will be, much with my parents. His business, largely improved by Ralph's diligence, was advantageously disposed of; and the old gentleman has enough to live upon in moderate comfort. His half-sister, Mrs. Blythe Walker, still has her home at his house; and she continues to receive from him the same patient and generous consideration which he has rendered to her ever since her misfortunes.

I began my history at the beginning; I will end it at the end—that is, it shall embrace the last occurrence of moment that has befallen me up to the time of its completion. Most of these chapters were written to occupy the hours of my husband's absence, during a period of joyful, yet anxious, expectation. The expectation was at length

fulfilled: its anxiety was destroyed, its joy consummated. In the house of my birth I suffered, and became a mother. During the time of helpless but blissful repose which followed for myself, the incident which I am about to record, and which was whispered to me immediately after it happened, took place. My nurse, wishing to display her new charge to the gentlemen in an adjoining room, left my bedchamber with an armful of flannel, *fine-linen*, and humanity. Scarcely, however, had she passed the door, when a monster, purple and grizzly, firm in the action, but in manner most gentle, removed the valuable burden from her grasp, and himself bore it before her. As this monster caught his foot and stumbled twice during his progress, she suffered not a little apprehension. But she need not have done so: his infirmities were not so false to him as good Providence was true! Mr. Thain brought the bundle safely into my father's presence, and after a lengthy search therein, found, somewhere, a tiny red face. It was of a hue that could only be developed into brownness: the eyes were blue and bright; and lo! about the little forehead a shadowy setting of hair, downy enough in texture, but in tint coal-black!

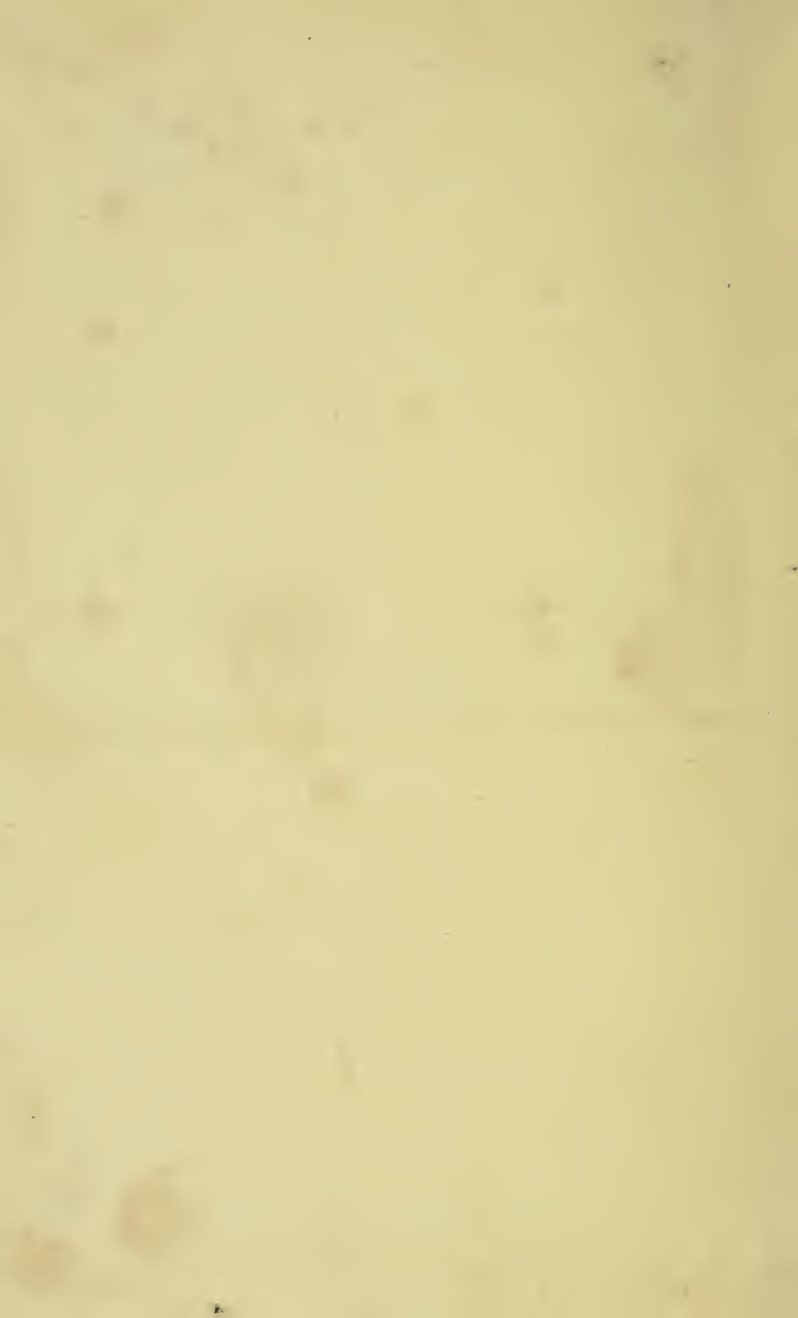
"Frank!" said the old man, solemnly.

"Frank," responded my father, with a gentle smile.

And "Frank" is my son's name.

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